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Caught Between Desire and Danger:

Power, Agency and Emotion Work in American College Women's Heterosexual Lives

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Abstract

This empirical study, grounded in a feminist epistemology, analyses young, American college women's reflections on their heterosexual lives. The context of these women's heterosexual experiences provides a backdrop to explore how the phenomena of power, agency, and self-work emerge through and interplay with heterosexuality. Building on existing research on various aspects of women's heterosexual lives (Fine, 1988; Holland et al, 1998; Tolman, 2002; Jackson and Cram, 2003; Powell, 2010; Beres and Farvid, 2010; Wade, 2017; Pickens and Braun, 2018), this study examines the ways that young women adhere to restrictive ideologies which dictate rules as to how to be a traditionally feminine woman and how heterosex ought to be experienced; but also how their accounts are able to, temporarily, rupture these oppressive power structures, as the women critically consider their capacity for agency and freedom.

The study is based on 5 focus group interviews with 18 women at a large, southern public university in the United States. This thesis explores how nuances of pleasure and danger as well as agency and structure transpire through the young women's narratives of heterosexuality, building up a complex picture of their experiences. In extending a Foucauldian (1978, 1980) understanding of discourse and power, this study will argue that the young women still have to navigate pervasive heterosexual discourses which dictate appropriate heterosexual behaviour. At the same time, this thesis critically analyses the women's claims to sexual empowerment and agency – which suggest there is some room for circumventing these discourses albeit only briefly – from a feminist perspective.

Finally, this research draws on Hochschild's (1979, 1983) conceptualisation of emotional labour to argue that the young women engage in a form of emotional labour, or emotion work, in order to maintain their heterosexual relationships and their emotions (and those of others) and to manage certain sexual situations, including those involving questions of risk and safety. Thus, this thesis addresses two interrelated problems that are prominent in the literature: the first is that feminist theory aims to provide women the conceptual tools to understand their heterosexual lives, but often either reduces their experiences to structural oppression or a vague liberal view of empowerment. Neither of these fully grapple with the challenges and opportunities for change that women face in heterosexual encounters. Secondly, the women interviewed often rely on strategies based on linguistic interactions and emotion work to manage their heterosexual relationships and a coherent sense of self. Women's heterosexuality

as explored in this thesis is considered a complex contradiction; the study concludes that young women are, on the one hand, able to articulate their sexual desires in an individualised sense but that acting out these pleasures with a partner proves difficult, suggesting that progress of sexual freedom remains intertwined with the intricate constraints of old.

Acknowledgements

"Once a woman is thought to have said yes to something, she can say no to nothing"
Katherine Angel, Tomorrow Sex will be Good Again

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Without the support of my family and my partner, this thesis would not have been possible. I'm not sure how to thank them for all they have done, and continue to do, for me. It is my biggest hope that they know just how much their love, comfort and encouragement has meant to me. I am beyond grateful and one day, I hope to be able to give back an ounce of what they have given to me.

To everyone in my place of fieldwork, and they know who they are, I owe the sincerest thank you for their care.

I am, of course, indebted to the women who shared a part of their lives with me. I hope this thesis can do their stories justice.

Angels' quote is one I found, by chance, in the final few weeks before submission. To me, it is captivating, almost moving, in a way. At the same time, I question it. I wonder, is it always the case that if a woman has said thought to have yes to something, she can say no to nothing? Yes and no, maybe, at times – as is the case with powerful quotes, they cause you to reflect in this way. I do feel, however, that it speaks to part of this thesis, to the binds women find themselves in, to the fine lines they are forced to walk, the complexities and paradoxes they encounter in their heterosexual lives. So, I ask that whoever is reading this thesis, sits with the provocation that this quote might muster and for the concept of it, the thought of yes and the simultaneous inability to say no, to be borne in mind as this research evolves.

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Chapter One – Introductory Chapter

At the time of writing, it is January 2021, four years since I began embarking on my PhD research in January 2017. Four years ago, as is often the case with PhD research, the crux of this thesis was very different to the one it is today. I was intent, back then, on exploring fraternity men's understandings of sexual consent, both theoretically and in their lived sex lives. I was interested fundamentally in the cultural make up of fraternities - what was it, about fraternities as an institution on college campuses, which contributed to the high incident rate of sexual assault at the parties and events which they host? (Armstrong and Hamilton, 2015). My overall aim became to understand how consent was reflected upon by young men in these powerful groups. However, access issues (which I detail in chapter four, the methodological chapter of this thesis) forced me to change course and instead, focus my attention on young *women* in college. What began as a similar study, exploring sorority women in college and their views of sexual consent in their own lived sex lives and in their theoretical understandings of consent, ended up becoming a study which reflected the broader factors making up the foundations of women's heterosexual lives. And not just from a sorority-woman's standpoint but from women on campus more generally. In my interviews, I was struck by how open the women were with me about topics beyond consent, of their pleasures, their experiences of orgasm, the painful sexual episodes they endured, their recognition of the inequalities in heterosex, their strategies to maintain their sense of self and their feelings of sexual empowerment. It became clear that the large body of research, both empirical and more theoretical, on heterosexuality and women's heterosexual lives conducted in the 1990's reflected only a *part* of women's heterosexuality today.

This thesis thus pays attention to what is known about college-aged women living their heterosexual lives, generating knowledge as to their pleasures, desires, their expectations, difficulties and the risks they face. This research recognises the sexual inequalities that young women report experiencing - in the area of pleasure, due to the risk of violence and related to the self-work they undertake to maintain their sexual relationships and their safety. At the same time, in this thesis I attempt to create an analytical space to assess, and to honour, the young women's declarations of empowerment and agency in heterosex. Accordingly, this thesis conveys a complex picture of women's heterosexual lives, detailing how their embodied experiences oscillate and exist between three main pillars: the all-governing male power and

pre-established unequal heterosexual discourses (e.g. the sexual double standard); their self-expressions of the carved-out ways in which they attempt to transform and resist these power relations (in order to feel a sense of empowerment, agency and to give voice to their own sexual desires); and the self-work required to uphold their heterosexual lives (particularly in regards to safety and the emotions of others). It is important to note that this thesis did originate as a socio-legal one, which focused on young women consenting to unwanted sex. While this is no longer the sole focus, this thread of the story is still part of the research. Indeed, it makes up a larger tapestry of young women's heterosexual experiences, contextualised by other stories of power, pleasure and harm. Thus, the main objective of this thesis is to empirically shed light on these nuanced, and although at times contradictory, factors that form the environment of the heterosexual women's stories.

I'd like to pause for a moment to define from the outset, what it is I mean by consented to unwanted sex. The term consented to unwanted sex that I use in this thesis, meets the same definition as Jessie Ford's (2020: 50) notion of unwanted sex. With sex that is unwanted, but not an assault, an individual makes a volitional choice to have sex but perceives that they could have stopped it (Ford, 2020: 50). This is true too of consented to unwanted sex, but I would add here the component that this kind of sex is not desired nor wanted by one partner. By contrast, with sexual assault or rape, the sex is both unwanted and one perceives they could *not* have stopped it - sexual assault, therefore, is a subset of all unwanted sex (Ford, 2020: 50). Unwanted, or consented to unwanted sex, is distinct from sexual assault based on the idea that one could have stopped the sex (e.g., the involvement of volition) (Ford, 2020: 50). However, it is also the case, as Ford (2020: 50) rightly points out, that the interactional, sexual moment can cause blurred boundaries. For instance, one might ask, is it a volitional choice to have sex if the consequences and the reputational damage (e.g., the idea that women are prudes, bitches or won't 'put out') are so great? It is my hope that this study emphasises the difficultly of bluntly applying legal and/or binary lenses to nuanced interactional moments like unwanted sex (Ford, 2020: 51). Therefore, unwanted, or consented to unwanted sex, is a complex sexual situation and this it is precisely this complexity which should be borne in mind throughout the reading of this thesis.

1.1 The Bigger Picture: Research into Women's Heterosexual Lives

Since the late 1960's to the present, a wealth of literature has centred upon the ubiquities of women's heterosexual relations (Jackson, 1995: 131). Research of this kind has engaged scholars from diverse fields (from criminology, psychology, sociology, gender studies and law for example) and spans ethnographies, in depth interview studies, as well as including the analyses of statistical data. Some of this earlier body of work builds up quite a concerning picture of young women's heterosexuality. Take for instance Michelle Fine's 1988 classic paper, *The Missing Discourse of Desire,* or ten years later the significant study on young women (and young men's) heterosexuality - conducted in the UK – Janet Holland and colleagues 1998, *The Male in the Head*, and later still there was Deborah Tolman's, *Dilemmas of Desire*, published in 2002.

I'd like to pause and frame these studies for a moment here, to note the rather pessimistic picture which this research paints of young women's heterosexual experiences. Given such a picture, in this thesis, I wanted to explore whether young women still reflect on their experiences as they did in these studies and whether we as researchers can interpret their heterosexuality in the same way. In my own personal experience – and reflecting upon the experiences of friends too - I was aware that the sexual double standard was still a prominent part of women's heterosexual narratives. However, I was interested, initially, if things had changed since the large body of work conducted in the late 1980's, 1990s and early 2000's. I wanted to explore and test the findings of these previous studies to an extent, investigating whether young women's heterosexuality was still heavily constrained and male-dominated by heterosexual discourses (as identified in some of the studies that follow). Additionally, I wanted to know what it was that reproduced women's relationships with unwanted and undesired sex, what made this so common. Further to this, I sought to highlight moments of resistance, if any, to these discourses wherein women could explore their own heterosexual desires and pleasures without fear of consequences. These studies, alongside others, are covered in chapter three, the literature review chapter, in order to lay the foundations for my thesis. At this point in the introductory chapter however, it is essential to consider the evolution of the research questions.

1.2 Journey Towards the Research Questions

As explained at the beginning of this introductory chapter, the overall aim and research questions pertaining to this thesis have changed over the course of the project. This thesis was influenced, in its infancy, by research which investigated sexual violence and so-called 'lad

culture' in a UK university context (Phipps et al, 2018; Phipps and Young, 2015). In 2015, the same year that the NUS published the *That's What She Said* report into women's experiences of 'lad culture' at university, I had finished my university bachelors degree. In the second year of my degree, as I settled into university life, I, as many others most likely did too, began to experience what I considered to be lad culture in its many forms. Seemingly innocuous but highly gendered jokes and banter, pressures, attitudes and behaviours were widespread. I recall one instance, an evening with friends at one of the many student club nights when, having had too much to drink I went home in a taxi alone. A harmless situation really but I remember, upon exiting the club and stumbling into said taxi, being called a slag and a slut repeatedly by young men outside who I had never met before. This was a very tame experience and in the grand scheme of things was not particularly harmful to me personally, (I was embarrassed, yes, but nothing more, I feel somewhat self-conscious detailing it here) and yet, I still remember it at the time of writing several years later. Episodes like this caused me to wonder why some young men at university acted in such a way towards their fellow women students.

This culture populated by some young men in higher education thus became of interest to me and became the initial focus of my PhD study, thinking specifically how these cultures contributed to the high rates of sexual violence against women at university. Through my reading (and many discussions with my partner who is American) I began comparing 'lad culture' in the UK to the culture of fraternities in a U.S. context. Both, supposedly, had links to violence against women, both were considered spaces whereby sexism, and homophobia proliferated. Fraternities though, were an institution I was unacquainted with - synonymous with U.S campus culture, they seemed like the illusive but key organisation to gain access to if I wanted to understand campus dynamics, and gendered violence. This thinking began my journey into fieldwork, arriving at a large public research institution in the U.S. of which roughly 14% of the student population were members of a fraternity. My intention was to gain access to as many fraternity groups as possible and discuss matters of sexual consent, both in their theoretical understanding of the topic and their reflections on it in their sexual lives, in a focus group setting. I decided upon the topic of consent as I thought it would be a useful way to contextualise the wider issue of unwanted sexual experiences, sexual assault and violence from those who, according to the data, are the predominant perpetrators. I sought to know what was happening in these young men's sexual encounters, what were their views, individually as well as culturally as a group, regarding heterosex, given that the rates of sexual violence, at fraternity parties in particular, were so high.

However, access issues – a certain level of secrecy and uncertainty of fraternity members in talking to an outside researcher – made it increasingly difficult to generate the appropriate sample I was hoping for. At this point, several months into my fieldwork, my sample had to change out of necessity. Thus, I attempted to explore the same issues from young women's perspective. First, I sampled solely women who were members of a sorority group, thinking that these women had the closest proximity to fraternity brothers and thus an insight into the fraternal culture. Quickly word of my research reached women unaffiliated with sororities and the study snowballed to include women on campus more generally. As I began to read more into past research on women's understanding of sexual consent and their reflections of heterosex, I realised there was a gap in understanding the experiences of young women on campus, specifically in regards to consented to unwanted sex. Sex of this kind was ambiguous, it was tolerated, undesired and normalised. What became interesting to me, however, was that though this kind of sex might be considered misconduct, for women it was often reflected upon as a bad experience as opposed to in a criminal sense. I wanted to understand whether this kind of heterosex was widespread for women on campus and if so, why they felt it occurred.

When it came to my first focus group with women then, I had a few targeted questions around sexual consent. I prompted them to share and discuss what they thought sexual consent looked like, how it manifested itself (verbally, physically through movements and gestures for example) and whether they felt their sexual wants were usually respected. During the first focus group, I soon realised that sexual consent was only part of a larger picture of young women's heterosexual experiences. Probing the first group of women with whom I met generally on their views on sexual consent led to more in-depth, complex discussions of their desires, the risks they faced in heterosex and how they dealt with them, their relationship dynamics with their partners and their nuanced understandings of pleasure and its construction. As a result, my second and third focus group sessions – as well as my follow-up discussions – involved more intricate questions regarding their heterosexual experiences. It became important to me to examine whether the sexual double standard was present, if women felt a sense of sexual agency and how they dealt with unpleasant sexual situations. These themes built up a multifaceted picture of young women's heterosexual lives as to how they were experiencing their sexual relations with young men. These topics and the questions that followed, all came about organically, developing from my first focus groups until my last. The women who shared their stories with me as part of this thesis drove the structuring of this project, from the first few

questions up to the analytical themes – I am extremely grateful for the hours they spent candidly with me.

In this thesis then, I explore, given the rate of sexual assault on campus and building on existing research, the following main research objective: what can be said about how college-aged women negotiate and navigate their heterosexual experiences with men? From this, I focus on the following sub-questions:

- To what extent do women exercise a sense of agency and/or sexual empowerment within their heterosexual lives?
- How do young women cope with unpleasant sexual situations?
- What theoretical and conceptual tools can be useful to understand young women's stories?

Both the current objective and sub-questions shifted and developed until they were fine tuned in the final stages of the data generation process - during the focus group sessions. Despite the significant change in sample focus – from fraternity men to college women more generally – the emphasis on young, college aged individuals' sexual lives, their pleasures and desires, the interplay of power within their experiences and the risks and concerns they face, have all remained constant throughout this research.

1.3 Overview of Methodology

An empirical study has been employed in this thesis in order to analyse women's reflections of their heterosexual lives. As detailed in chapter four, this project used focus groups with young women at a large university in the U.S. south, speaking to 17 women over the course of the data generation stage. 5 focus groups in total were conducted, 2 of which were with the same group of women for the purpose of a follow up discussion (see Appendix D for a detailed summary of the membership of each focus group). Creating an environment in the data collection process whereby a collection of voices, experiences and stories is fostered was important to me as a researcher. Indeed, as my interest centred upon women's reflections of their heterosexual lives as a group, isolating them from their social context (from their friends and away from their university for example) would have been inappropriate. Afterall, I was keen to understand how women would reflect on their heterosexual experiences and how it was

they would talk about these experiences together as a group. Moreover, emphasis on these communal and connected selves – and by using focus groups to substantiate this (Wilkinson, 1998) – allowed, in my view, for an understanding to develop with regards to the social and cultural processes through which women's understandings and experiences of sex, relationships and consent are constructed.

As mentioned, I approached the focus group interviews in a semi-structured way, with some pre-planned questions that I wanted to ask the young women and a rough schedule which I sought to follow. Nevertheless, the discussions were often lively and detailed, usually exceeding the one-hour limit which I had set myself. The rich discussion as part of the focus group sessions bought about unforeseen areas of interest, such as the discussion of faking orgasm and the idea that the young women enjoyed the act of providing pleasure to their partners. As a consequence, the focus groups proved a setting in which the women could introduce their own concerns and phenomena as part of their heterosexual lives. My conversations with women subsequently became akin to a sort of consciousness raising, which I discuss later in chapter four. These themes were often ones I had not anticipated and thus did not plan for, but they created a more organic and realistic process of data collection as the topics raised were of close importance to the young women. Additionally, too, I was increasingly aware – after reading much of the literature around the topic, speaking to women close to me and reflecting on my own lived experience as a woman – that women would, most likely, describe their experiences of sex in a multitude of different ways. Therefore, using focus groups in this research offered the ability to access the language and the vocabulary which women would commonly use to describe their heterosexual experiences (Firth, 2000: 278).

Chapters five and six of this thesis discuss the results of the data generation and show how the young women's heterosexual experiences are marked by the interplay of gendered power and emotion/self-work. More specifically - and influenced by notions of gendered power and emotion/self- work – these fifth and sixth findings chapters analyse the two main themes namely of the young women's constructions of sexual pleasure, as well as the risks and anxieties they often report facing during heterosex. These themes led me to hypothesise, in the penultimate chapter, that women's heterosexual lives are contradictory and complex, in that there are aspects of their heterosexual experiences which follow a highly gendered and stereotypical order, an order which links to gendered/discursive power and emotion/self-work. However, and at the same time there are, albeit small, moments of rupture to this established

order, wherein women report temporarily stepping out of and attempt to challenge these so-called rules of heterosexuality. Building up this complex picture is a central tenet of this thesis.

1.4 Key Concepts and Analytical Categories

This thesis relies on several key analytical and descriptive categories such as, the use of the terms agency/freedom interchangeably, alongside a discussion of structure. The category feminine is employed throughout the subsequent chapters and empowerment too is often discussed. It is essential then, as part of this introduction, that these terms are defined here before being referred to in the discussions that follow.

1.4.1 Agency/Freedom

Beginning with agency and freedom, both are utilised as vital components in further understanding the inner workings of both power and emotion/self-work. When I refer to agency, I intend to pay close attention to the choices that women report making in their sexual lives. Thus, when the term agency is used in this thesis, I am thinking of, and understanding it from, Kabeer's conceptualisation of the term:

> Agency is the ability to define one's goals and act upon them […] it is about more than observable action; it also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their sense of agency, or the 'power within'. (Kabeer, 1999: 438)

I use agency often interchangeably with freedom, which we can understand by looking to the work of Sen (1984: 201), particularly his concept of the 'positive freedoms', as he calls it, being in a general sense the freedom "to do this," or "to be that." Understanding agency and freedom together leads this thesis to consider Sen's (1984: 203) 'agency freedom', which refers to what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values they consider important. Thus, a person's agency cannot be understood without taking note of their aims or objectives, and-in a broad sense, the person's conception of what is good (Sen, 1984: 203).

1.4.2 Structure

Alongside discussions of agency and freedom, structure is often cited in this thesis, usually in reference to the debates between agency and structure. In referring to structure in this way, I

am considering the social structures which inform the lives of the young women, sometimes allowing or disallowing them to feel agentic and/or free. These structural social conditions are ones which are out of the individual's control and point to how sexual desires, practices and identities are enmeshed within our social structure (Hockey, Meah and Robinson, 2004; Jackson, 2005: 28, 29). Structure thus refers to the structural features and conditions of the young women's lives and can signify the sets of rules and resources which individuals draw on and reproduce in their social lives (Schilling, 1997). The debate about agency and structure then, asks whether there really is room for agency to take place, and I pay attention here to how structural factors of life impact upon the way individuals make meaning of things and how their identities are constructed, leaving as a consequence, sometimes little room for agency to work and navigate out of these already embedded structures (Jackson, 2005: 29).

In the following chapters I highlight the structure of the lives of the women involved in this thesis, considering whether, because they were majority white and middle class (and these are structures which inform their lived experience), they were afforded the privilege to use concepts of agency and freedom to describe some of their heterosexual experiences. It is important to inquire then, whether women - be they working class for example - would be able to utilise narratives of sexual agency in a similar way to the women I interviewed as part of this thesis, or whether, given the differences in their structural social conditions and the effects of this, sexual agency and freedom would be less generally employed to describe their heterosexual experiences (Wray, 2003; Skeggs, 1997).

1.4.3 Femininity

Femininity, as a concept, is scattered throughout this research project and is developed in more detail in the second chapter. This thesis uses femininity in the same way that Tolman, Davis and Bowman (2016: 5) do, particularly when they illuminate that femininity, as an ideology alongside masculinity, describes an interlocking set of practices, norms and beliefs which work "in tandem to regulate and organise gender-appropriate behaviours and expressions." With this considered, femininity in this case – which I often use alongside the word 'traditional' - compromises the formulaic, inherently feminine attributes in heterosexual women (Pickens and Braun, 2018; Tolman, Davis and Bowman, 2016: 5). These consist of qualities women and girls are to enact, including behaving in submissive, passive and agreeable way towards men, to prioritise men's needs, avoiding conflict and anger in others and rather, being caring, calm and measured (Pickens and Braun. 2018; Tolman, Davis and Bowman, 2016: 5). It is worth noting

that the kind of femininity described in the subsequent chapters, that which is orientated to accommodating the needs and interests of men, is perhaps in line with that of Connell's (1987: 186, 187) description of emphasised femininity, in that it is a form of femininity that is "constructed in the overall context of women's subordination to men."

1.4.4 Empowerment

The concept of empowerment has an established place in feminist research, becoming a cornerstone of studies which consider how to understand women and girl's self-confessed sexual empowerment (see for example the conversations between Duits and Van Zoonen, 2006 and Gill, 2007; Lamb and Peterson grappling with the concept in 2011; Gavey, 2016; Bay-Cheng, 2011; Tolman, 2012). Rappaport (1987: 122; see also, Rieger, 1993: 281) described empowerment, generally speaking, as referring to a "mechanism" by which people, communities and organisations "gain mastery" over their affairs. The kind of actual control, and by extension influence, that Rappaport (1987) refers to here can be, as Rieger (1993: 281) points out, conflated with a *sense* of personal control. It is this *sense* of empowerment or personal control, which is most relevant to this thesis. This is particularly true if we consider Kieffer's (1984: 32) description of empowerment as the "fundamental empowering transformation from a sense of self as helpless […] to a sense of self as assertive and efficacious." In the later chapters, there is an analysis of the young women's self-expressions of sexual empowerment and enjoyment (such as, the power shifts felt by the women as a consequence of being in control of men's sexual pleasure). At this point I am reminded of the previous discussion of structure, and it is important to acknowledge that definitions of the kind of sense of empowerment are likely culturally and socially dependent (Peterson, 2010: 307). It is for this reason that I am in agreement with Peterson (2010: 313) when she notes that because there is not a single definition of empowered sexuality for women and girls, it will differ accordingly from individual to individual.

Following on from this, it is crucial one critically engages with the term empowerment here as there are issues with it and as such these issues should be borne in mind throughout the reading of this thesis. Riger's (1993; see also, Bay-Cheng, 2011) critique of empowerment which I refer to is most useful here, namely when she argues empowerment to be a practice typically concentrated on that of the individual. If empowerment in this way is heavily self-interested, focused on the personal advancement and the development of a subjective sense of self-efficacy, this can lead to the potentially unmitigated competition and conflict among those who are

empowered (Bay-Cheng, 2011: 715; Riger, 1993). Additionally, as Bay-Cheng (2011: 715) notes, empowerment of this kind may exclude building solidarity with others in favour of one's own advancement. Furthermore, there does seem to be something of an epistemological blind spot in the literature here as there is no solid definition of what constitutes sexual empowerment and, what it encompasses, beyond a subjective sense of self-efficacy.

With this considered, it is not my intention in this thesis to advocate for a sense of empowerment that is conservative, in that it is heavily focused on the needs of the individual over that of the society or a collective group. My intention is not to dismiss the young women's subjective perceptions of empowerment but rather to respect and honour their reported *sense* of sexual empowerment, acknowledging its multiple dimensions and degrees. Perhaps it is useful to consider the concept of empowerment in line with a continuum as Peterson (2010: 313) does, meaning that that empowerment may be a developmental process that allows girls and young women to become more sexually empowered over time as they gain greater experience. As Peterson (2010: 313; see also, Matthews, 2018) posits, recognising that sexual empowerment is not all-or-nothing, we (as researchers in this space) might well be more comfortable with the fact that adolescent girls and young women need to experiment with a variety of ways of being sexual (and being sexually empowered) in order to move in the direction of a healthier sexuality.

This view aligns nicely with the argument that the young women in this thesis may well feel a sense of subjective empowerment because of the material and structural conditions of their lives at the time of the interviews. Here I am thinking that because they were young and at university, the opportunity was afforded to them to experiment, to hook up and engage in something of a sexual freedom, knowing that marriage and more committed relationships could come later in life (should they want this). Thus, I am in agreement with Gavey's (2016: 719) reading of empowerment in that women's claims to self-empowerment ought to be treated as real and legitimate, without them becoming depoliticised and thus untethered from the situation or structure of women's and girls' lives.

1.5 Conclusion: Chapter Outline

This thesis is structured according to the following outline: an analytical and theoretical framework is provided in chapter two, a literature review in chapter three, chapter four will consist of the methodological focus, chapters five and six detail the major findings of the research, a discussion chapter considering the main findings will follow making up chapter seven and the final chapter, chapter eight, will constitute the conclusion.

The following theoretical framework chapter outlines the overarching theories which have influenced the building of this project. In this chapter I analyse my own relationship to feminism and discuss its importance, going on to shed light on a Foucauldian view of power and examining the theoretical framework of emotion work. In the same chapter, and influenced by previous work on women's heterosexual lives, I go on to consider the two central concepts of sex and gender which frame this thesis. This theoretical and analytical chapter is followed by chapter three: the literature review. In the literature review I will present the canonical studies in the space of young women's heterosexuality, critically assessing these studies and opening up a space to discuss this thesis' original contribution. The fourth chapter details the methodological focus employed for this research project, describing each stage of the data collection process, the research design and going back to how feminist epistemology has influenced and informed the creation of this thesis and what this meant in practical terms.

The first of the overarching findings are covered in chapter five, entitled: 'constructions of pleasure and desire'. In this chapter, I attempt to keep central the nuances that make up the young women's accounts of pleasure in heterosex. I examine, in the wider context of faking orgasm and the imbalance of young women's sexual pleasure being prioritised, how the young women in this thesis report a sense of power from a femininized sexiness and desirability. I explore specifically here how the young women attempt to be respected notwithstanding their wider reported environment of gendered and sexualised inequality and thus questions of agency and empowerment begin to be uncovered. I conclude in this chapter that the young women face mixed messages and double binds in relation to their pleasure/desires and how to behave as 'respectable' heterosexual women. The second and final findings chapter - 'women speaking to the dangers in heterosex' - follows in the sixth chapter. In this section I detail women's acts of self-work in their heterosexual lives, which involves an internal negotiation: managing their own and their partners emotions and mitigating potential risks. I consider the women's

heterosexual reflections in line with a juxtaposition of pleasure and danger, with the young women having to navigate and weigh the pleasures of their sexuality against the cost of this sexual pleasure in their daily choices and acts.

Chapter number seven, the discussion chapter, ties the finding themes together to come to four postulations, such as 'young women adapt and adhere to restrictive ideologies which dictate what it means to be a traditionally 'feminine' heterosexual woman'. I use three theoretical concepts of power, and three theoretical concepts of emotion work, to analyse the two main themes considered in chapters five and six. I conclude that heterosexuality can be seen as a contested site, where young women were afforded, albeit few, opportunities to disrupt power, accessing sexual agency and transforming heterosexuality. However, I recognise that these disruptions take place in an environment whereby traditional heterosexual discourses of gender and sexuality are still present, restricting the young women's subversions to an extent (Harris, Aapola and Gonick, 2000: 887). Consequently, I suggest that women continue to tread a fine line between male power, traditional heterosexual discourses and their own sexual agency and illuminate the ways in which their heterosexual lives take significant work to maintain. Chapter number eight concludes the thesis with a reflexive look to the research experience as a whole. I contemplate what I have learnt about women's heterosexual lives, I consider how I have answered the research questions central to this thesis and state the original contribution that this research makes to the wider body of knowledge. What becomes central to this thesis, and is what is expressed in the final chapter, is the realisation that different and somewhat contradictory possibilities for sexual expression exist alongside one another in young women's heterosexual lives.

Chapter Two - Framing the Thesis, Analytically and Theoretically

2. 1 Introduction

This chapter looks to the overarching analytical and theoretical frameworks which are adopted in this thesis. I begin this chapter by discussing my own personal relationship to feminism and explore how feminism, as a framework, has influenced the making of this research. Here I reflect on some personal concerns with feminism, namely deliberating my identity as a feminist in recent years and contemplating what it means to call a project a feminist one. Following this is an overview of the two central theoretical frameworks – Foucault's discursive power and Hochschild's emotional labour - which have influenced the orientation of this project. A definition of the two concepts – gender/sex and heterosexuality – that anchor this research, and which appear as the key concepts in much of the literature, conclude this chapter. In this final section I summarise how I have come to view these two key terms and how they ought to be considered throughout the reading of this thesis.

The broader, existing research on young women's heterosexual lives will then be presented as a standalone chapter, in a literature review format in chapter three. In the aforementioned chapter, amongst the very wide range of literature in the field, I will focus on qualitative, historical and also interpretive literature which considers power, heterosexual discourses and the notion of emotion work. This will foreground some of the debates of agency/structure, which I define in the introductory chapter and which will be considered in more detail in subsequent chapters of this thesis. I have chosen to focus on qualitative research as it is closest to the nature of this thesis and reflects similar methods of data collection to that of my own. Additionally, the qualitative research that informs this thesis not only provides a rich foundation upon which to ground an in-depth analysis of the nuances of power and agency in heterosexual college women's lives, but also sits within the tradition of feminist research that goes beyond – the helpful but somewhat limited - quantitative data on women's sexual lives. The ways in which these particular studies have informed the major themes explored in this thesis, and particularly my findings presented in chapters five and six will be analysed. I intend to illuminate then how this thesis makes an original contribution to the existing field; a contribution which involves a unique analysis that blends and brings together work of both a

theoretical and empirical nature. That is, various theoretical frameworks which consider concepts of power, discourse, agency and emotion work are employed to analyse young women's experiences of heterosexuality. Additionally, this thesis offers recent empirical data which explores women's reflections of the heterosexual lives to a field which has been dominated by somewhat older studies of the 90's and early 2000's. I will now shed light on the analytical and theoretical frameworks which have influenced the building of this thesis, looking first to my relationship to feminism and its importance, as an analytical framework, to this thesis.

2.2 Feminism and my Positionality

The analytical framework which has been the starting point in the building of this thesis is feminism. The feminist practice crucial to this work lies in investigating the underlying structures that underpin women's heterosexual lives, and locating these in dynamics of power, traditional heterosexual discourses and emotion work. This project displays its feminism in one major way: by maintaining - as Cook and Fonow (1986: 13) do - that feminist research is not research only about women but research for women to be used in transforming their sexist society. It is important to note too that this thesis is a feminist one in that it is grounded within the broader context of a long line of feminist research on sexuality. Such research dates back to the 1970s and 80s when radical feminist scholars like Catharine MacKinnon, Andrea Dworkin, Kate Millet and Shulamith Firestone came to shed light on women's oppression, particularly as regards sexuality, in an effort to overturn the male-dominated social order. Later still, the likes of Carol Vance, Wendy Hollway and Stevi Jackson began to theorise about the power and pleasure of women's heterosexuality from a feminist perspective. I'd like to pause, before contemplating my own relationship to feminism, to consider a more wide-ranging picture of feminism and how it has progressed as a multifaceted movement. The point here will be to present as full a picture as possible, given constraints of space, of feminism and the ideologies within it, as a way of positioning myself and my research.

In perhaps its earliest incarnation, feminism's public face was one which had a very liberal focus as in the 1900's, calls for equality were synthesised into a suffragist movement which campaigned for women's right to vote. However, these early years of feminism did have a strong divide between the middle-class suffragettes and those who were working class, focusing on labour divisions (much like today). Alongside, for example, the National Union of Women's

Suffrage Society (NUWSS) – the leading suffrage organisation in 1897 with over 21,000 members, the majority of women who were upper or middle class - was a growing women's labour movement, particularly popular for women working in Lancashire's cotton mills (almost 30,000 of whom signed a parliament-presented suffrage petition in 1901) (Jackson, 2018).

The early, liberal feminists of this era however, envisioned women's full political inclusion (Marilley, 1996) and descended – at least in Britain - from 19th century Liberal theory and political philosophy (taking inspiration for example from the work of Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stewart Mill) (Holton, 1986: 9). Arguably, we can still see elements of this approach in politics today, particularly in Scotland where in the Gender Representation on Public Boards Act 2018, statutory guidance helps to address the persistent underrepresentation of women in public life (Gender Representation on Public Boards Act, 2018). The act sets out that on boards of listed Scottish public authorities, 50% of the non-executive members ought to be women, setting a "gender representation objective" (Gender Representation on Public Boards Act, 2018). This, to an extent, echoes a liberal feminist attitude to the status of women in that the Act offers gendered social safeguards with regards to representation in business (Gerson, 2002: 794).

Moving to the 1960's and the height of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM), feminists began something of a broadening of the liberal demands of the suffrage debates. Texts such as Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* were associated with sparking the women's movement's revival (Gady, 2018). The former worked to analyse women's oppression alongside institutions of marriage and motherhood as impinging on women's freedoms (Valtchanov and Parry, 2017), the latter meanwhile railed against sexist teachings (e.g., that a women's place was in the home) and promoted the unifying goal of social equality to some 3 million readers (Gady, 2018). Indeed, the WLM in the United States did win some major legal and legislative victories, such as, for example the Equal Pay Act of 1963 (Murphy, 1970; Love, 2006), the guaranteed reproductive freedoms of Roe v Wade (Roe v Wade, 1973; Clegg and Gough, 2000: 168; Hanisch, 1989) and the right to educational equality under Title IX (Gady, 2018; Evans, 2015, 142).

Perhaps most importantly though, as the movement grew there became distinct strands of feminist ideologies, including those which were more liberal equality focused as well as those who practiced a more radical form of feminism, women who did not want sameness but rather

strived for a politics of difference. For those involved in the more radical wing, the liberal feminist approach to reform the system – by simply adding in women – was not enough (Davies, 2010). Radical feminists of this era went so far as to say that a liberal feminist ideology in fact ignored the root causes of gender inequality (which were considered to be a consequence of the patriarchal sex/gender system) (Davies, 2010). These feminists were revolutionaries as opposed to reformists, and they sought to eliminate men's domination over subordinated women by challenging existing social institutions, structures and norms (Davies, 2010). Radical feminists created new vocabularies which are still relied upon today, such as, for example, the "personal is political" and they were the first to bring about the practice of consciousness raising (Willis, 1984: 92). Moreover, feminists of this ideological view argued that male supremacy was a form of domination systemic to society, a set of materialised institutional relations and not just bad attitudes (Willis, 1984: 93). Radical feminists for example, opposed the sexual objectification of women in pornography (Dworkin, 1981), criticised the law as it pertained to rape and sexual harassment (MacKinnon, 1979, 1987, 1989) while others challenged the institution of heterosexuality (Rich, 1979; Firestone, 1970; Wittig, 1980). Some radical feminists took issue with social institutions such as the workplace and the family, and its structures such as motherhood, housework and the like (see e.g., Ann Oakley, 1974; Federici, 1974). There was also considerable overlap between some radical feminists and socialist feminists (see MacKinnon, 1989 who identifies as a Marxist radical feminist; see also Haraway, 1985; and scholars in the United Kingdom such as, Oakley 1974; Walby, 1989; and Rowbotham, 1974).

Postructuralist feminism meanwhile was different in its approach. Unlike the liberal and radical threads of the movement, the postructuralist view paid attention to issues of knowledge, discourse, difference and power, paying close attention to how these intersected in different women's lives (Mills, Durepos and Wiebe, 2010). Women were not considered one unified group with a singular identity under a postructuralist lens (as they were in many of the WLM circles), rather women here were considered to be constantly creating new and shifting identities (Mills, Durepos and Wiebe, 2010). And so, in recognising that it is possible for women to inhabit multiple positions of subjectivity (Wills, Durepos and Wiebe, 2010) both the more liberal and the radical strands of feminism were criticised from a structuralist standpoint – namely for excluding some women and only speaking to a certain type of woman's experience (see Spelman, 1990).

In particular, feminist ideology in the 80s was challenged for the "race blindness" and more specifically, its indifference to black women (Thomlinson, 2012; Collins, 1986; Harris, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989; Hooks, 1981; See Spivak, 1988 for a postcolonial critique of Western feminist theories). Questioning the existence of a unitary womanhood in the liberal and radical feminist ideologies the era allowed for distinctions of race, class, sexuality and other identity categories – and their intersections – to be considered (Williams, 1990; Hewitt, 1985; Spellman, 1988). For example, Angela Harris (1990: 588) criticised the notion of a monolithic woman's experience independent of race, class, sexual orientation and other facets of experience referring to this as "gender essentialism." Harris (1990: 588) pointed out that those who attempt to speak for all women in these circles are mostly white, straight and are of socioeconomic privilege. Adrienne Rich (1979; see also, Harris, 1990: 588) meanwhile termed this "white solipsism", meaning to think, imagine and speak as if whiteness describes the world.

Black feminism, characterised for its focus on Black women's need to ameliorate conditions for empowerment on their own terms (Collins, 1989; Taylor, 1998), evolved from these criticisms of liberal and radical feminisms' one dimensionality. Written and practiced by Black feminists, this approach was a way of, as Smith (2000: 370) notes, "reading inscriptions of race, gender and class and in the context of these, Black feminism worked to raise questions about the way the "other" was represented in oppositional discourse." Alongside its race-blindness, the feminist movement of the 1960s, 70s and 80s was criticised too for being unaccommodating to lesbians and being unable to speak to their experience (Rich, 1983). Queer feminism, for example, worked to refuse normative identity categories (e.g., of a collective womanhood) and criticised the attachment to the, assumingly, stable categories of men and women (Rudy, 2000). As Rudy (2000: 196; see also, Jagose, 2009; Butler, 1990, 1994; De Lauretis, 1991; Rubin, 1993, 1994) argues, feminism, which focuses on these binary categories of identity and sameness, misses the mark as it "relies on the bifurcation that it tries to correct."

None of these aspects of feminism and feminist practice have been forgotten or left behind, but rather things have become more nuanced and multifaceted. Sometimes for example, these feminisms converge with more modernised ideologies. More contemporary approaches, such as what has been termed "carceral feminism" and the notion of "lean-in" or neoliberal feminism for example, might both fit under radical and liberal feminist ideologies respectively. The term carceral feminism has been used to refer to feminist efforts that overwhelmingly endorse law-and-order responses to sexual and gendered violence (Taylor, 2018); lean-

in/neoliberal feminism meanwhile, becoming popular as a consequence of Facebook chief operating officer, Sheryl Sandberg's 2012 book *Lean In*, which promoted and convinced women to pursue their goals vigorously, reviving, as Catherine Rottenberg (2014: 240, 244) notes, the promise of 'true equality' – one of the central cornerstones of liberal democracy. It is important to point out however, that there are likely few individuals who would self-identify as carceral feminists and/or as lean-in/neoliberal feminists (Phillips and Chagnon, 2020: 51) (hence my referring to carceral feminism as an assigned label). Instead, as Phillips and Chagnon (2020: 51) point out, a lean-in, neoliberal feminism ought to be considered a particular type of discourse growing out of liberal feminism and deriving from traditional liberal notions of equality. Carceral feminism, meanwhile, is commonly associated with radical feminism, and has roots in radical feminist conceptualisations of justice, where men who benefit from exercising patriarchal power over women (e.g., through gendered violence) are punished. Crucially, however, these assigned labels can only go so far in that feminists can, of course, occupy different positionalities at the same time and thus these categories are not always that helpful. They do, however, give us a way to understand how feminist ideologies have evolved.

Thinking of my own positionality though, I'd like to reflect at this juncture upon the approaches of feminism that sit well with me and those which do not. The point of this thesis is not to say that all men oppress women in heterosexuality. Nor is the focus to reveal criminal behaviour and have it punished by expanding the law to include certain sexual harms (as, arguably, a carceral feminist logic would). My reasoning for the latter point is that focusing on the criminality of behaviour here not only portrays women as victims but sets an overwhelmingly punitive precedent, strengthening, an already severe, criminal justice system and becoming likely to inflict harm on individuals most societally ostracised (Cossman, 2018; Khan, 2016). As a result, I have a nuanced view of feminism - I agree with some radical feminist interventions and disagree with others. For instance, I have become distanced from certain radical feminist approaches, for example to justice for gendered violence. I do, however, appreciate the value of the work of scholars and activists in the space of radical feminism and do reflect upon some of their work in this thesis. For example, I am inspired by the concept of consciousness raising, and how it can be applied to focus group methods of data collection, which evolved as part of the radical feminist movement in the 1970s and 1980s. However, focusing solely on the subordination of women in heterosexuality, perhaps as a radical feminist would do, is problematic in my view because, as Ann Snitow and Carol Vance (1984: 132, 133) rightly posit, such an approach ignores the potential for variations in women's sexual expression. I am in

agreement with Jana Sawicki (1986: 34) here then, in that rather than generalise about women's experiences, as feminists we ought to begin to explore the meaning of the diversity of sexual practices to those who practice them. With this in mind, I have attempted throughout this thesis, to convey that heterosexuality is nuanced and complex and consequently experienced differently for different women. It is for that reason that I consider there to be *elements* of heterosexuality which are oppressive and constraining but that does not mean that it is experienced as such by everyone all of the time – and to view it in that way would be to consider it under too narrow a lens.

And so, in the constellation of feminisms which I have briefly – and somewhat partially reviewed – I consider my approach to be one which examines women's lived experiences and the dynamics of micro-power in their heterosexual lives, paying close attention to discourse and how it shapes women's reality and identity (Mills, Durepos and Wiebe, 2010). Rather than start with any particular feminist theory, I take inspiration from MacKinnon (1991) and start with practice, practice here being akin to that which is a socially lived experience. Thus, in my thesis, this practice lies in women's confrontation with the realities of heterosexuality (MacKinnon, 1991: 14). At the same time however, I question a unitary view of womanhood and allow for distinctions and intersections of identity to be considered (Mills, Durepos and Wiebe, 2010). It is because of this position that I understand my sample, and by extension this research, to be limited as it does not include racialised and classed perspectives. Because of that it must be borne in mind that I am shedding light only on *some* women's lived experiences of heterosexuality and feminism. The feminist framework in this thesis, therefore, does not and cannot speak for all women, only women of a specific location– predominantly white, middle class women, in college, some of whom belong to sororities. I reflect upon the limitations of this in more detail in the methods chapter of this thesis, rejecting the idea that there is a single truth for all women. As MacKinnon (1991: 16) notes, to speak of treatment "as a woman" is not to cite any homogeneous generic or ideal, but to refer to a diverse and pervasive material reality of social meanings and practices. Nevertheless, I display my feminist view most evidently in this thesis by focusing on the concepts of discourse and power within the social (heterosexual) sphere, considering how the women in this thesis both exercise power through micro-practices of resistance and are simultaneously constrained by the technologies of heterosexual discourses.

The following sections of this chapter will now look, firstly, to an overview of power and discourse under a Foucauldian frame and secondly, will consider the theory of emotional labour as it pertains to this thesis.

2.3 Foucault, Power and Discourse

This thesis draws on a Foucauldian theoretical framework of power and discourse to inform the central research questions of this thesis, namely how young heterosexual women make sense of their sexual experiences with young men. Influenced by the work of Wendy Hollway (1995) and Nicola Gavey (1992) here, and their use of Foucault, I refer to discourse as a system of statements which adhere to common meanings and values. These are not individualist ideas, instead these meanings and values are a product of social factors, powers and practices (Gavey, 1992; Hollway, 1995). Rather than thinking about the operation of power in relation to sexuality in a repressive sense by one gender against another (e.g., male domination, female submission), Foucault's 1984 analysis offers a more nuanced view of power through the use of discourse (Powell, 2010: 70; Gavey, 1992; Gavey, 2005; Hollway, 1984; Bartky, 1997). As Foucault puts it:

> "Power not only forces us to say no, it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than a negative instant whose function is repression" (Foucault, 1980: 119).

Discourses, for Foucault, are historically variable ways of specifying knowledge and truth, functioning as sets of rules and thus, discourses are powerful, and power is constituted through them (Ramazanoglu, 1993: 19). As Foucault (1979: 176; see also, Gavey, 1992: 327) puts it, disciplinary power is now less corporeal and works in a subtly coercive way and is infused in various ways throughout the whole social body. Taking Sawicki's (1991: 67, 68) definition here, Foucault's disciplinary power refers to power exercised directly over the individual body (via an individual's gestures and behaviours for example). Disciplinary practices of this sort aim to render individuals more powerful, useful as well as docile, and though disciplinary power is said to have originated within institutions (such as hospitals and prisons), it is also present in microlevels of society in the everyday habits and behaviours of individuals (Sawicki, 1991: 67, 68). At this microlevel then, disciplinary power takes an insidious form of control, establishing

norms against which individuals and their bodies are judged and against which they police, and surveil, themselves (Sawicki, 1991: 67, 68; see Bartky, 1991; Bordo, 1985; Deveaux, 1994). So, a power of this kind may be exercised by officials through institutions, but it is in the discourses reproduced by these disciplinary technologies where power lies and is difficult to resist (Ramazanoglu, 1993: 19; see Bartky 1991 and her discussion of women's self-surveillance through beauty practices). Broadly then, discourses produce truths and, for Foucault (1990: 93; see also, Ramazanoglu, 1993: 19) "we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth."

The point here is that a dualistic understanding of power, such as the oppressor (men) who oppresses the oppressed (women), does not untangle the complex manifestations and potential of power (Bailey, 1993: 110). In contrast to the theories of coercive, male power, there is no all-powerful subject which manipulates discourse but rather, those who deploy and produce discourses as "discoursing subjects" forming part of the "discursive field" (Foucault, 1991: 58 in Ramazanoglu, 1993: 20). If power is constituted in discourses it thus has no one specific source, rather power is everywhere (Ramazanoglu, 1993: 20). However, the women involved in this research certainly spoke of clear experiences in which they revealed feeling subordination and oppression as a consequence of male power. Yet, to assume that this is a single truth, for all women in all circumstances, fails to consider the nuance, complexity and multi-faceted nature of women's sexual selves and their realities; that is, in a Foucauldian sense, many different truths are situated in different, more micro discourses some of which are more powerful than others (Ramazanoglu, 1993: 20), making possible certain ways of acting. According to this view, particular kinds of sexual practices and desires (for example, heterosexuality) - our sexual identities that we may take for granted - are discursively constituted through normative discourse and social practices. As such, despite dominant, normative discourses of heterosexuality (which are highly gender-specific), there is still space for various possibilities for sexual subjectivity to emerge (Gavey, 2005: 86) for the young women in this thesis.

The following section of this chapter will explore the final theoretical framework which this thesis builds upon, the notion of emotion work.

2.4 Emotion Work

In addition to the Foucauldian framework of power and discourse, this thesis builds on the concept of emotion work to develop and analyse the themes present in the data. Emotion work becomes a useful framework to apply to moments in which the young women in this thesis speak to engaging in a sense of self-work. This self-work reveals itself often in unwanted sexual scenarios and takes the form of them navigating through these events by managing their own emotions, the emotions of others and their physical space.

In its first iteration, emotional labour was developed and popularised by sociologist Arlie Hochschild, in her 1983 study of female flight attendants (see also, Firth and Kitzinger, 1998; Kelly and Vera-Gray, 2020). For Hochschild (1983; see also, Firth and Kitzinger, 1998; Kelly and Vera-Gray, 2020), labour rooted in this kind of paid work involved dealing with or managing other people's emotions (e.g., soothing tempers, preventing frictions, mending wounds to one's ego). Overtime, this concept has been extended from a couching in labour (e.g., the work one does which is necessary and waged but for unrewarded effort) to refer to the private sphere, thus becoming 'emotion work' (McQueen, 2016: 25, 26). For Hochschild (1983: 7; see also, McQueen, 2016: 25, 26) this emotion work is highly gendered and defined as the "management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" and as an "act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling." Thus, to "work on", as Hochschild (1979: 561) puts it, an emotion or feeling is the same as managing an emotion or to doing "deep acting." Emotion work in this sense can be done by the self upon the self, by the self upon others, and by others upon oneself:

> In each case the individual is conscious of a moment of "pinch," or discrepancy, between what one does feel and what one wants to feel (which is, in turn, affected by what one thinks one ought to feel in such a situation). In response, the individual may try to eliminate the pinch by working on feeling (Hochschild, 1979: 262).

Thus, the concept also extends to the work people do to their own emotions - feeling happy at a party or sad at a funeral for example - rules which govern how people feel or not feel in ways appropriate to the situation (Firth and Kitzinger, 1998: 301, 302; Hochschild, 1983). As Hochschild (1979: 551) maintains, the terms "feelings" and "emotions" can be used interchangeably here, although the term "emotion" can denote a state of being overcome that

"feeling" does not. Emotion then, can be defined as bodily cooperation with an image, a thought, a memory cooperation of which the individual is aware (Hochschild, 1979: 551), and emotion incorporates sentiments, affect and feeling (Turner and Stets, 2002 in McQueen, 2016: 24), so that, as is the case in this work, it is used in a broad sense, to include all aspects of affect and affection (Burkitt, 2014 in McQueen, 2016; 24).

In more recent years, Hochschild herself has acknowledged the popularity of her conceptualisation of emotional labour and she has argued that its use in some cases is an overextension of the concept's original purpose. In a 2018 interview for example, Hochschild (2018) made it clear that applying her theory to work done by women in the home – a context in which it is often used - is to "blur the thinking" of the theory. Hochschild (2018) explained that the theory is most often overextended and applied in regards to enacting to do-lists in everyday life. She gave the specific example of "calling the maid to clean the bathtub" as an action deemed emotional labour, as it supposedly is a task which is "burdensome" (Hochschild, 2018). Refuting this as a valid example of emotional labour, Hochschild (2018), noted that in these extensions of the concept, there is no social-class perspective, positing that "there are many more maids than there are people who find it burdensome to pick up the telephone to ask them to clean your tub." Thus, there needs to be precision with which the theory is applied particularly in regard to the present research. So, although the young women's emotion work in this study is unpaid (unlike in Hochschild's study), the women's struggles – for example to refuse sex - can still be interpreted as a form of emotion work. This is precisely because, as Hochschild (2018) has suggested, this emotion work creates a sense of anxiety and that this needs to be managed for the women who experience it. The crux here then is that emotion work can be fear-provoking. And so, in navigating how to refuse sex, the women speak to the ways in which they have to defend themselves against men's anger or violence, of which they are always aware and always anticipating (Hochschild, 2018). Arguably this renders it a quintessential example of emotion work given that Hochschild (2018) makes clear in her interview: "it's only emotional work if it's disturbing for you."

2.5 Central Concepts

As explained in the introductory chapter, this section begins with an overview of two overarching concepts – gender and heterosexuality – which are fundamental to this work and the space this thesis operates in. These two concepts matter as gender is an organising principle

of society and heterosexuality is a set of practices, as well as an institution, which structures behaviour. It is thus necessary to assess how these concepts are defined and consider how this research attempts to contribute to the body of work which connects the two of them. In order to assess the theoretical work behind these concepts sex must be considered alongside gender. It is for this reason that as opposed to an exploration of the construction of sex explicitly, a discussion of sex will follow on from one of gender.

2.5.1 Gender and Sex

From a sociological standpoint, gender is understood to be socially constructed and/or a performed social identity (McQueen, 2016: 11). Ann Oakley's (1972: 4) classic text, *Sex, Gender and Society,* "spells out" as she puts it, the meaning behind the unfamiliar (at the time of her writing) notion of gender. Many social scientists credit Oakley (1972; see also, Buldeo, 2016; Delphy, 1993; McQueen, 2016) for establishing the sex/gender binary as she provided a clear definition in which sex referred to the biological differences between males and females, while gender was a matter of culture and thus signified a social classification into masculine and feminine. In 1975, a few years after the debut of Oakley's work, Gayle Rubin wrote *The Traffic in Women,* an essay in which she too argued how the gendered differences were socially produced. Rather than completely separating out sex from gender, Rubin (1975: 165; see also, Mikkola, 2008; Delphy, 1993) used the phrase the 'sex/gender system' in her work to describe "a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention." The arrangements of the sex/gender system are, as Jackson and Jones (1998: 133) explain, culturally variable conventional ways of organising human sexual relations, particularly through the structures of kinship and marriage. Gender itself, for Rubin (1975: 179; see also, Jackson and Jones, 1998: 113) is thus defined as "a socially imposed division of the sexes" and a "product of the social relations of sexuality."

Somewhat similarly to Oakley, gender differences in Rubin's (1975; see also, Mikkola, 2008; Delphy, 1993) opinion are the oppressive results of social interventions which dictate how women and men should behave. Thus, Rubin (1975: 204) writes that women are oppressed *as* women and "by having to be women." Given gender is socially constructed then, in her essay Rubin (1975) suggests it can potentially be alterable by political and social reform and such changes could bring an end to women's subordination. A transformation of the kind that Rubin (1975: 204) suggests here would create a "genderless (though not sexless) society, in which one's sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is, what one does, and with whom one makes love."

At this point then, it is essential to point out that though gender may well be socially constructed, this is not independent of other factors such as, race and class. In her classic text, *Inessential Woman,* Elizabeth Spelman (1990; see also, Mikkola, 2006: 78; Lugones and Spelman, 1983) argued that the features women are presumed to have in common are in fact features that only *some* women have. Spelman (1990; see also Mikkola, 2006: 79) went on to claim that womanness is inseparable from other aspects of one's identity such as, race and class and thus individual women do not share a universal womanness. Rejecting a commitment to the existence of common identities among women, or to a so called 'golden nugget' of womanness that all women have, Spelman (1990) makes it clear there are significant differences among members of the category 'woman' differences in race, class, culture, as it has already been noted, as well as more, to quote Stoljar (1995: 262) "fine-grained differences in individual experience." If we understand gender to be socially constructed and are aware that social construction will societally differ, being a woman must then be culturally specific and it is for that reason that Spelman (1990) views women with similar racial, cultural, and social backgrounds to share a particular gender. Being a woman is, therefore, conditioned differently according to different societies, women are not simply women, but are particular *kinds* of women (Spelman, 1988; Stoljar, 1995; Mikkola, 2006, 2008). For example, gender in the United States (the context where my research is based), has its own specific classed and raced formations and these are different for different women (e.g. the white college aged women interviewed in this thesis verses a Black woman in Detroit). Gender for these two sets of women is important because it is reproduced in different ways and leads to different outcomes and behaviours.

Here we might look to Kimberle Crenshaw's (1991) extensively referenced conceptualisation of intersectionality, wherein she theorises on the intersections of gender and race to draw attention to the ways in which black women in particular are discriminated against in the workplace. As Chandra Mohanty (1988; 2003; see also, Young, 1994) notes then, referring to 'women' as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, creates a view of all women as equally powerless and oppressed victims. What might be more important here instead, would be to question how and whether women in a particular time and place suffer discrimination and limitation to their actions and desires (Young, 1994; Mohanty, 1988, 2003) (Also, relevant here is Mohanty's (2003) critique of Western feminisms homogenous categorisation of "third world women".)

When theorising gender then we ought to exercise some caution as if we fail to see the importance of race, class and for example, disability in the construction of gender, we risk conflating the condition of one group of women with the condition of all women (Mikkola, 2006: 81). Further to this, looking only through a gendered lens and simply "adding on" other characteristics (e.g., race and class), is a flawed methodology. It is important to consider, as Crenshaw (1991) does, how these positions intersect to create overlapping oppressions situated in wider social structures of power (e.g. the law, politics, religion, the economy). That the definition of the term 'woman' is fixed operates as a disciplining force here, legitimising certain practices and experiences, while curtailing others (Nicholson, 1998: 293). Considering this, and as mentioned earlier on in this chapter, we can argue that though my thesis is one which has gender and/or womaness at its core, it brings into view only a certain *kind* of womaness (e.g., of white, heterosexual, cisgendered women). This is a limitation of this research and as such the data discussed in this thesis cannot and should not be extended in a general sense to apply to *all women* (a contestable, non-homogenous category if we consider the work of Spelman and others, which will be reflected upon further in the methodology chapter of this thesis).

If gender is constructed, what of sex? Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* both become relevant here when theorising sex and gender. Going back to the work of Oakley (1998), who defines sex as biological and gender as cultural, Butler (1990; see also, Morgenroth and Ryan, 2018) criticises such distinctions between sex – as natural, essential, and pre-discursive (i.e., existing before culture) – and gender as its cultural interpretation. Rather, Butler (1990) argues that it is not just gender that is culturally constructed and has prescriptive qualities, but this also applies to sex as a binary category. Reiterating arguments made earlier in this chapter, Butler (1990; see also, Nelson, 1999: 337) questions feminist approaches that distinguish between sex and gender (between material/biological bodies and gender ideologies), as they fail to recognize how the binary male/female of sexed bodies is produced through discourses of gender. To imply that sex (biological male/female) lies 'outside' of gendered discourses inscribes as 'natural' a gendered, heterosexualized duality, one theorized as part of a pre-discursive moment (Nelson, 1999: 337). In *Gender Trouble* then, Butler (1990) argues the distinction between sex and gender as follows:

> It would make no sense to define gender as the cultural interpretation of sex, if sex itself is a gendered category. Gender ought not be conceived merely as the cultural

> inscription of meaning on a pregiven sex; gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established (Butler, 1990: 10).

Consequently, for Butler (1990: 10) gender is the "discursive/cultural means by which a natural sex is produced and established as prediscursive - a politically neutral surface on which culture acts." In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler (1993: 2) notes that sex is not "a bodily given on which the construct of gender is artificially imposed" but rather "a cultural norm which governs the materialization of bodies." Sex then, for Butler (1993: 12), "is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time." It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms (Butler, 1993: 12). Sex, or sexed bodies, are thus produced through discourses about gender (Nelson 1999: 337). Therefore, the sexed subject only has meaning once it is discursively produced; there is no prior prediscursive sexed body (Butler, 1990).

For Butler (1990; 1993), sex and gender are not separable and free floating from one and other, but rather they are co-constitutive, and although they should not be conflated, they are deeply connected and mutually reinforcing. Gender here is the grounding factor and sex then becomes the organising principle to keep gender intact. In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler (1993; see also, Jackson and Scott, 2001: 16, 17) turns to the notion of linguistic performatives – forms of speech which by their utterance, bring what they name into being. As Jackson and Scott (2001: 16, 17) outline, here the pronouncement, for example, of 'it's a girl', made at the birth of a child, brings a girl into being, begins the process, as Butler (1993) puts it, of girling the girl. This process, informed by, in Butler's (1993; see also, Jackson and Scott, 2001: 16, 17) view, speech act theory, works because the phrase 'it's a girl' draws on the authority of the conventions which establish what a girl is and in naming sex, the norms of sex are being cited. Sex here is then materialized, through a complex of citational practices which are both normative and regulative – and subsequently coercive and constraining (Jackson and Scott, 2001:16, 17).

Considering the work of West and Zimmerman (1987: 127) for a moment here, gender in their view is the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category. Gender activities emerge from, and bolster claims to, membership in a sex category (West and Zimmerman, 1987: 127). Grounding their essay in the work of Goffman, West and Zimmerman (1987) see gender as constituted through the 'social doing' of interaction. Doing gender, as they call it, means creating differences

between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biological and once these differences have been constructed, they are used to reinforce the "essentialness" of gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987).

Building on these ideas of 'doing' gender, Butler (1990; 1993; 1999; see also, Hines, 2018: 68) argues that no one is born one gender but that we learn to 'do' gender (e.g., we act/speak/walk in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or a woman). Her distinguished concept of performativity becomes important here wherein Butler (1999; see also, Hines, 2018: 69) makes the case that the rules of gender are acted out repetitively and compulsively, in ways that suggest they are natural. Rooted in theories of symbolic interactionism, gender from this performative perspective is not something one is, it is something one does; a sequence of acts, a doing rather than a being (Mikkola, 2006, 2008; Butler, 1999; Nagoshi et al, 2012). As Nelson (1999: 336) outlines, subjects – for Butler - are continually performing identities that are prescribed by hegemonic discourses: the processes by which subjects are compelled through structures of meaning to participate in reproducing dominant discourses of identity (e.g., gender and sexuality). Performativity is thus not a singular act, it is always a reiteration of a norm or a set of norms (Butler, 1993: 12). Consequently, Nelson (1993: 337) notes that Butler advocates theorizing gender and sexuality as performative, a concept of performativity recognises that 'the subject' is constituted through mediums of power/discourse, which are continually reproduced through processes of resignification, or repetition of hegemonic gendered (racialised, classed, sexualised) discourses. Rather than being an essential quality following from biological sex, or an inherent identity, gender is an *act*, a performance, which grows out of, reinforces, and is reinforced by, societal norms and produces the illusion of an inherent binary sex (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2018).

However, it is important to consider that gender is not *just* a simple performance, it is fundamentally imbedded in the self. Butler (1993; 1999; see also Jackson and Scott: 2001: 16) is thus not suggesting that gender is something one 'puts on' in the morning and then takes off, but rather she makes it clear that we are constrained into gender, arguing that sexed bodies are forcibly materialized through time. There may well be some moments of agency in the performance but because of the hierarchy of power, Butler (1993; 1999) would consider us to be limited in that we can never overthrow power totally, we are always operating within it and thus, power will always find a way to bring one back to what will be controlled.

Butler's (1990; 1993; 1999) conceptualisation of gender as a performance is applicable in relation to this thesis particularly when, for example, in chapter five, the young women speak of a "duty as women" to please men sexually, neglecting to an extent their own sexual desires in the process. It is likely that, sexed and gendered as women, the women in this thesis are conditioned to perform heterosexuality in line with these traditional heterosexual discourses of women as passive givers of pleasure and men as those with powerful desires which must be satiated. This might then be an example of what Butler (1999) refers to as performing one's gender well, which provides reassurance that there is a gender identity after all. Performing it wrong meanwhile, initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect (e.g., the sexual shaming and double standard which the young women in this study experienced, because they arguably did not perform their 'duty' well enough).

In concluding this section, we can turn to Hines' (2018) work. She suggests that, irrespective of whatever is meant by gender when we talk about it (e.g., whether it is biological sex, or a socially constructed role we perform, or a combination of the two), it is clear is that gender has, to an extent, the potential to be fluid and thus not restricted to male or female (Hines, 2018). But cisgender men and women (as well as transgender and non-binary people) can find that their social expectations, about what roles they can perform for example, limit their opportunities (Hines, 2018). For example, we see the young women interviewed as part of this thesis performing heterosexuality in often responding to the sexual desire of others and experiencing violence and harm should they 'step out' of these gendered roles (Hines, 2018; Rubin, 1975). Therefore, it ought to be borne in mind that there is some tension in noting a fluidity here in that it perhaps underplays the role of social structures. However, as seen in the previous example, there are somewhat severe consequences of attempting to live more fluidly beyond rigid binaries, even for those who are cisgender and heterosexual (see, for example, the work of Linstead and Brewis, 2004; Beemyn, 2015).] I will show in the chapters five and six of this thesis, although it is true that gender can be seen as operating, for the women I spoke to, as a part of a set of structures that at times limit their options and choices, yet gender also exists as a site of partial agency as the young women clearly express, at the very least, having an awareness of the need to reshape the gendered practices which they are constrained by (Hines, 2018). The same can be said of heterosexuality, the second key concept in this research which I will turn to now.

2.5.2 Heterosexuality

Staying with Butler (1990; see also, Fischer, 2013: 504) for the moment but moving to discuss heterosexuality, Butler proposed understanding heterosexuality in terms of a "heterosexual matrix," a concept that explains how the illusion of stable gender identities are socially constructed from heterosexualized discourse of "natural" male–female difference. For Butler (1990; see also, Fischer, 2013, 504) heterosexuality – as is the case with gender identity - must be constantly achieved and reproduced in daily life by habitually enacting social practices associated with cultural gendered ideals associated with heterosexuality.

However, it is important to consider the intellectual issues one encounters when using Butler, in that it becomes difficult to consider heterosexual experience critically while using the tools offered by her conceptualisations of sex and gender. Jackson and Scott (2001: 18) neatly summarise these issues with Butler's formulation, arguing that her conceptualization of the process whereby gendered bodies are materialized is framed from within a philosophical, rather than sociological, position. Consequently, Jackson and Scott (2001: 18) argue Butler misses "crucial elements of the social construction of gendered bodies at the level of both social structural power relations and everyday social interaction and practices." Butler's account of sexuality centres on, in Jackson and Scott's (2001: 19) view, the normativity of heterosexuality. Bodily practices which can potentially subvert the gendered heterosexual order are considered in Butler's work, however, Jackson and Scott (2001: 19) argue that Butler says little about sexual practices. This means that the sexual, erotic body stay, in Jackson and Scott's (2001: 19) words, "strangely silent" in Butler's account of sexuality. As they note, sex entails embodied selves engaged in embodied social activity and embodied interaction (Jackson and Scott, 2001: 20). Jackson and Scott (2001: 20) rightly make the case then that sexuality and sexual activity is about living bodies, what we do with them and what we feel through them, but it is not *just* about bodies. Here as elsewhere, the body is inseparable from the totality of the self and if we forget this, we do not challenge the body–mind dualism, but actually reinstate it (Jackson and Scott, 2001: 20). Thus, perhaps Butler's view needs some sociological input here – and I attempt to bring this about in the discussion that follows in the remainder of this section; I will show that, on the one hand, gender and heterosexuality are institutionalized and, on the other hand, I signal the ways in which embodied individuals interact with others, and reflexively with themselves, in producing, sustaining and (sometimes) subverting gender (Jackson and Scott, 2001 :18). I also point to this in the chapters five and six, the findings chapters, by discussing embodied activities and interactions (such as, faking orgasm, providing men with sexual

pleasure, experiencing pain during heterosex) practiced by the women (i.e., embodied individuals) (Jackson and Scott, 2001: 19).

Within sociology then, there is a burgeoning area of research which considers heterosexuality as an institutionalised form of practice, relationships, identity (which is often taken for granted and assumed as 'normal' fact of life) and family structure within society and culture (Jackson, 1996, 1999; Richardson, 1996; Rich, 1980; Hockey et al, 2007; McQueen, 2016). Heterosexuality, by which I mean, most simply, sexual relations between men and women, does not only refer to the types of sex individuals are engaging in, or with whom, but also to the socially constructed beliefs which underpin social institutions, and frame everyday life (McQueen, 2016: 50). Heterosexuality as an institution – through the state, the church and marriage for example - under this view entails a hierarchical relation between men and women (Jackson, 1996). The institutionalisation of heterosexuality works in an ideological sense, through discourses and forms of representation which define sex in phallocentric terms, positioning men as sexual subjects and women as sexual objects (Jackson, 1996: 31). Thus, heterosexuality involves living up to a particular idealisation (for young heterosexual women for example this particular idealisation might involve prioritising male sexual pleasure over their own, avoiding the sexual double standard of the slut label and/or being unable to boldly reject a man's sexual advances in fear of retaliation) a perspective which makes some of the women's struggles in this study unsurprising (Hockey et al, 2007).

Perhaps the most critical and commonly cited analysis of heterosexuality, as an institution, came in 1980 with the work of Adrienne Rich (1980; see also Farvid, 2015: 96) who highlighted the pressure on women to be heterosexual. Rich (1980; see also Farvid, 2015: 96) argued that women were not born heterosexual, nor did they choose to become heterosexual, but rather they were coerced into heterosexuality by a social system that required 'compulsory heterosexuality' from them. Like others, she criticised biological approaches to understanding heterosexuality, asserting that this 'sexual orientation' was not innate, but socially and culturally produced as such (Farvid, 2015 : 96). Rich (1980; see also Wittig, 1992; Ingraham and Saunders, 2016: 1) argued that heterosexuality is a taken for-granted ideological construct responsible for shaping how sexuality is understood and that heterosexuality, as an institution, exists as a network of highly intertwined social institutions (marriage and motherhood for example). Compellingly, Rich (1980; see also, Ingraham and Saunders, 2016: 1) exposes the complexity of the institution of heterosexuality by claiming that the institutions of marriage and

motherhood serve the interests of capitalism by presenting reproduction as the sole purpose of female existence and integral to sustaining a social order dependent upon the development of a future workforce. Heterosexuality under this view is a totalising system. It consists of highly regulated, organized, and ritualized set of social processes and practices, circulating as normal through intertwined networks of social arrangements and ideologies (Ingraham and Saunders, 2016: 2). These include woven together social processes that operate at the level of the individual, through personal relationships (dating, engagements, proms, weddings etc), culture, and the state, serving to produce and normalize heterosexuality (Ingraham and Saunders, 2016: 2; Tolman, 2006). Compulsory heterosexuality works and retains its power because it is invisible as a political institution and thus qualifies as an institution since it is made up of rule-bound and standardized behaviour patterns like those mentioned above (Ingraham and Saunders, 2016: 2; Tolman, 2006; Seidman, 2009; Jackson, 2006; Fischer, 2013).

However, Jackson (1993: 133) rightly points out that heterosexuality as an institution is flexible and not totally monolithic, at times it certainly reflects a patriarchal, hierarchical structure but at other times there is some "room to manoeuvre" within these constraints. The struggle to persuasively theorise heterosexuality becomes apparent here and is encapsulated in a longstanding debate between radical feminists who argue that heterosexuality is inescapably oppressive for women, automatically rendering women powerless (e.g. Dworkin, 1987; MacKinnon, 1983; Jeffreys, 1990; Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1993; Kitzinger et al, 1992) and other feminists who reject this view, instead claiming that heterosexuality, and by extension penetrative sex, can be, and is, enjoyable, rather than an example of eroticised submission (see Vance, 1984; Hollway, 1993; Segal, 1994; Vanwesenbeeck, 1997). The work of the latter set of scholars posits that the power relations of heterosexuality are subject to subversion (Jackson, 1996). These highly polarised debates of the late 1970s to the early 1990s - divided feminists over issues of, as we can see here, sexuality, sexual representations, sexual activity and women's agency (Cossman, 2018: 2, 3). The term "sex wars" was used to describe these heated debates over feminist depictions of women's sexuality; and by some accounts, these gulfs surfaced as a consequence of the 1982 Barnard College Conference entitled "Toward a Politics of Sexuality", but by other accounts, the catalysing event was the burgeoning of a feminist anti-pornography movement in 1983 and 1984 (Abrams, 1995: 308, 309). These debates often lined up along a series of various axes, such as: danger/pleasure and victim/choice, with radical feminists insisting on sex as a site of danger and victimization of women, while sex radicals emphasizing instead sex as a site of pleasure and female autonomy (Cossman, 2018: 2,3).

Thus, the radical feminist critics of heterosexuality, are cautious (to put it mildly) about sex positive feminists attempts to develop more egalitarian sexual practices and change the meaning of penetration as seen in the latter view (Jackson, 1999). Radical feminists claim that such endeavours obscure the problem of the institutionalisation of penile penetration under heteropatriarchy (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1993; Jackson, 1999). Under such a view then, the institution of heterosexuality becomes a totally determining practice, with each instance of penetration considered an act of men's power (Jackson, 1999).

The gulf between radical feminist critics of heterosexuality and heterosexual feminists seeking to defend their sexual practices is clear (Jackson, 1999). I disagree with the former view, that the meaning of penetration and heterosex are inevitable and universal or that they are a determining and defining element of women's oppression and as such symbolise harm (Smart, 1996: 165) as this is too simplistic an interpretation. Such a position lacks acknowledgment of the range of experiences encompassed within heterosexuality, how women might resist and/or renegotiate gendered relationships within an institutionalised heterosexuality (Hockey et al, 2002). I say this because at many points in the data generation for this thesis, the women I spoke to discussed the very real pleasures that they experienced as part of heterosexual penetrative sex. As such, the women were not, according to my analysis, taking part in the eroticisation of their own subordination (the message consistent with a radical feminist position for instance) and to present them in such a way would be an inaccurate reading of their stories and experiences. Perhaps this is an example of what Vanwesenbeeck (1997: 172) calls "cracks in the phallocentric order", where women give accounts of power and pleasure in heterosexuality despite the prevailing definitions of a heterosexuality where women often assume the subordinate position. In denying these experiences we risk denying heterosexual women any agency at all, seeing them not as individuals with options and possibilities for sexual power, but rather as destined to submit to the desires of men either willingly or misguidedly (Jackson, 1999).

I am in agreement with Jackson (1999) here in that we need to retain a critical, more subtle and, crucially perhaps, a less condemnatory perspective on heterosexuality and by extension, on the pleasures and powers that come with it. We might do this by exploring the cracks that Vanwesenbeeck (1997) refers to, as they might bring into view possibilities for change (Jackson, 1999). Certainly, it was the case in this work that penetration, within the institution of

heterosexuality (that is sexual relations between men and women), seemed at times rich with symbolic meaning and was still undoubtably at times, coercive. But, at the same time, it cannot be assumed that in all instances it carries this singular meaning (Jackson, 1999).

It becomes important to clarify at this point that this thesis does not view heterosexuality as necessarily oppressive, nor does it consider the women whose narratives inform this work as victims of heterosexuality (Holland et al, 1996; Smart, 1996). It is true that heterosexuality exists as a dominant category within our Western culture (Hockey et al, 2007: 180). However, I wonder as Carol Smart (1996: 175) does, whether we can speak about heterosexuality in the frame of diversity and complexity, with competing meanings – not all bad and not all good, not always oppressive and, by extension, not always empowering. As Smart (1996: 170; see also Hockey et al, 2007: 32) says, heterosexuality may be many things, with multiple meanings attached to different sexualities at the same time.

This research, hopefully, demonstrates that to assume that all heterosex equals oppression is authoritarian and inaccurate. I agree with Smart (1996) in that the heterosexualities which men and women inhabit can be and are in fact diverse. Heterosexuality may well be institutionalised, a "given" term, as Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1993) put it, and it certainly does not exist in a vacuum void of agency and power. However, we can see radically different female (and male) heterosexual identities emerging in this work, whereby women are far from being the victims of patriarchy, and far from accepting male sexual dominance. Indeed, some of them simply describe having a good time as part of heterosex, while others seem to express an ambivalent relationship to traditional heterosexuality, challenging and even rejecting it at times (see also Smart, 1996: 177). Although, of course, this thesis speaks to the experiences of one small subset of women (which I go on to explore in chapters 5 and 6), and thus we must always remember that this subset of women can not and do not speak for *all* women. At the same time thought, to fail to acknowledge these experiences would be to reduce all women to a single position under heterosexuality: that of the cultural dupe (Jackson, 1999). Taking such a view becomes somewhat obstructive to open-minded theorising about sexuality, as it becomes a challenge to imagine how women could ever hope to subvert their inevitable oppression to become ethical and agentic heterosexual subjects. Consequently, influenced by the work of Smart (1996) and Hockey et al (2007; see also, McQueen, 2016), this thesis uses the concept of *heterosexualities*, moving to a view which represents a site of new gendered identities, wide diversities in the

performance of heterosexuality (as is the case with gender), as well as an appreciation of the differences in meaning and experience.

Of course, even though these heterosexualities are diverse, we can not lose sight of the fact that these will always be configured through and constrained by race, class, geographical location, physical ability and so on. This intersectional lens is particularly relevant to understanding how the sample of respondents in this thesis experience and talk about sexuality. As is analysed in more depth in chapter 4, the methods chapter of this thesis, the women involved in this research were, at the time, attending a large, well-ranked U.S. university, the majority were white, and some were members of sororities. All of these aforementioned factors suggest the women were part of a privileged institution. This standpoint ought to be born in mind, since it forces us to be somewhat circumspect about positing the women's narratives of choice as an argument that they have total sexual agency, or that their lives aren't circumscribed by heterosexuality to some degree. Perhaps then, although this emphasis on choice and agency should be respected, it should not be taken out of its cultural and social location – particularly if the young women are being fed the narrative of choice by their culture, social media and their institution. One ought to acknowledge then, that this narrative of choice is produced by a particular set of privileges.

2.5.2.1 Traditional Heterosexualities: Binaries of Femininity and Masculinity

The women in this research construct, at times, their femininity and heterosexuality as powerful, active and desiring. At the same time, however, the women also speak to the ways in which they are constrained by discourses dictating appropriate hetero-feminine behaviour (the sexual double standard, for example, still features heavily in the young women's lives). The women and their stories, experiences and reflections which inform this thesis are increasingly "free" from patriarchal control, their claims to sexual power are real and true and yet they suggest these claims teeter on the edge of new and traditional aspects of femininity. In this section, I intend to explore these in more detail, shedding light on the rigid binaries of femininity and masculinity as a third concept key to the thesis.

However, we should exercise some caution here and ought not assume that this expressed desire for or embracing of sexual freedom is new. Rather, many generations of women have expressed a similar desire for sexual agency that is akin to the desires of the women interviewed for this thesis (for some historical context see: Willis, 1982; Weeks, 1990; D'Emilio and Freedman, 1997; Connel, 1997; Plummer, 2002; Cook, 2004; Hall, 2012; Fisher and Szreter, 2010; Lee

and Logan, 2017). Additionally, it is important to note that a more traditionalised, constraining type of heterosexuality is also burgeoning and renewing itself particularly in the context of the U.S.. I am thinking specifically here, for example, of the phenomenon of tradwives, a web-based term wherein white women extol the virtues and romanticise (often via social media and YouTube) a woman's sphere of staying at home, submitting to male leadership and bearing lots of children, aka, being "traditional wives" (Kelly, 2018; Mattheis, 2018: 27, 28). Though this movement has a guise of tradition it is compatible with modernity (in that it has had a resurgence in recent years) and crucially, tradwives express their choice through severely conservative femininity (which also has ties to white supremacy, see Mattheis, 2018 and Kelly, 2018). This suggests that sexual liberation is not the *only* path for multiple heterosexualities.

Nevertheless, the dominant discourse of heterosexuality has overwhelmingly dictated distinct and opposite positions for masculine and feminine desire (Budgeon, 2016: 407). These discourses shape subsequent identities and practices according to a dichotomous logic in which, for example, women are considered sexually passive, are less easily pleasured than men and value the emotional closeness of sex and relationships over the embodied physical pleasures (Muise, 2011: 415; Budgeon, 2016: 407). Gill (2007: 151) takes this further, as she posits girls and women are the monitors of all sexual and emotional relationships; they are responsible for producing themselves as desirable heterosexual subjects as well as pleasing men sexually, protecting against sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy, taking care of men's self-esteem and defending their own sexual reputations. On the other hand, representations of masculine sexuality have long emphasised it to be an active, essentialised sexual desire, an unwieldy force which must be controlled and contained (Khan, 2014: 427; Budgeon, 2016: 407). Perhaps the most famous characterisation of male heterosexuality is Hollway's (1984: 63) 'male sexual drive' discourse, wherein the meanings of men's sexual behaviour and feelings confers messages of a natural, healthy and evolutionary imperative to sex and sexual desire. Hollway (1984: 63) explains that when men overstep the bounds of morality or even of the law, other men (and women who have taken for granted the portrayal of men's sexuality which this discourse produces) offer this discourse as a kind of excuse for their behaviour, because after all, men cannot help their urges. This particular point is explored in further in the first findings chapter of this thesis.

Going back to feminine heterosexuality which is the focus of this thesis, although it has been associated with submissiveness, with emotional closeness and love (Muise, 2011: 412), emerging

constructions of female sexual desire as active are becoming more visible and depictions of empowered femininity are increasingly inciting women to take up a more assertive and expansive position within sexual relations (Budgeon, 2016: 408; White, 2003; Attwood, 2011; Bleakley, 2014; Henry and Farvid, 2017). There are, for instance, several moments in the interviews conducted for this thesis in which the women speak to these constructions of female sexuality as positive and active. Some women described a sense of enjoyment that came with pleasuring their sexual partner, others spoke openly and plainly about their desire to have causal sex over long-term relationships, while some women rejected outright the idea of traditional female heterosexuality as emotional and passive.

Indeed, at the time of writing, rappers Cardi B and Megan Thee Stalion released their hotly anticipated collaboration track, entitled WAP. A heavily explicit track, WAP shifts the focus often seen in male-led music videos which saturate the industry in that it is not the case of men objectifying women but instead, two black women are seen and heard, rapping about their unashamed sexuality, their pleasures and desires on their own terms. Nevertheless, the track has seen significant backlash, calls for its ban have been popularised as right-wing politicians consider WAP to be defamatory and anti-woman. My intention is not to digress into an analysis of whether WAP is or is not empowering for women, but rather to point out that when women explicitly express their sexual wants, likes, needs - as Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion do in their track and by extension as the women in this thesis have done at times - a puritanical discussion of sexual morality often ensues.

2.5.2.2 Traditional Heterosexualities: Femininity and Postfeminism

The increasing (hetero)sexualization of popular culture has been met with a rise in scholarly interest (Donaghue et al, 2011). Gill (2008) might, for example, consider Cardi and Megan's track and the women's claims to sexual power in this thesis, to be shifting from sexual objectification to sexual subjectification in that it relies on a distinction between women being objectified, and women freely choosing to objectify themselves, at their own discretion and for their own purposes. Increasingly, feminists are the ones calling for an interrogative consideration of these kinds of empowered femininities, offering sceptical analyses of the consequences they have for female identity (Gill & Scharff, 2011; Donaghue et al, 2011). For Gill (2008: 436), the problem here seems to be that the focus on choices as autonomous remains complicit with, rather than critical of, postfeminist and neoliberal discourses that see individuals

as entrepreneurial actors who are rational, calculating and self-regulating. These notions are also evident at work in aspects of digital capitalism and the gig economy (e.g through Pornhub, camming and more recently still via platforms like OnlyFans) (See: Berg, 2016; Brasseur and Finez, 2019; Jones, 2020).

Gill (2008; see also, Meenagh, 2017: 448) has described postfeminism as entangling feminist and anti-feminist ideas, drawing upon the neoliberal grammar of individualisation to encourage young women to empower themselves by choosing to become a particular kind of subject (e.g., one who is appealing to heterosexual men). Meenagh (2017: 448) suggests that this complicates the idea of agency as the act of self-determination for young women is contingent upon taking up a limited, pre-prescribed subjectivity. Feminist scholars in this space see two issues here; that an emphasis on choice does not equate to women having more agency per se in their personal lives as their choices within a postfeminist and neoliberal gender order are sites of intense scrutiny and that more choice does not necessarily equate with resistance to dominant heterogender norms (Budgeon, 2016: 409). In practice then, contemporary, empowered femininity of Cardi B, Megan Thee Stallion and of the sort implied by the women I spoke to in this thesis, is structured in inherently inconsistent ways; femininity is presented as a site of individualized possibility, yet at the same time, this must be performed within specific parameters (Budgeon, 2016: 409). As Gill puts it:

> On the one hand, young women are hailed through a discourse of 'can-do' girl power, yet on the other their bodies are powerfully reinscribed as sexual objects; on one hand women are presented as active, desiring social subjects, yet on the other they are subject to a level of scrutiny and hostile surveillance that has no historical precedent. The patterned nature of the contradictions […] in which notions of autonomy, choice and self-improvement sit side-by-side with surveillance, discipline and the vilification of those who make the 'wrong' 'choices' (e.g. become too fat, too thin, or have the audacity or bad judgment to grow older) (Gill, 2008: 442).

Under this critical view of sexual power and postfeminism, we are left to conclude that while young women may feel empowered by the neoliberal postfeminist discourses of sexual agency, taking up a neoliberal postfeminist sexual subject position in and of itself does not adequately challenge gendered power dynamics (Meenagh, 2017: 460). Thus, women and girls who consider themselves as liberated, powerful and free sexual subjects, do not challenge the

reproduction of heteronormative power dynamics inherent within these discourses (Meenagh, 2017: 460). The question as it pertains to this thesis becomes whether feeling empowered and being empowered are the same thing and whether empowerment is merely a feeling or whether it should be connected to power and autonomy in other spheres (Lamb, 2010: 301). As Lamb (2010: 301) points out, feeling emboldened sexually is not the same as empowerment and if a woman or girl feels empowered because she has the power to attract attention and admiration via her sexuality, that may be a kind of power of sorts, but it is a narrow one. Arguably then, a critical reading of women and girls claims to such power might consider that the kind of empowerment felt here is the power to be sexual only, potentially, through imitating a particular kind of sexualised way of being, one which is, in Lamb's (2010: 301) view, oriented towards being a sexy object for someone else.

2.5.2.3 Ruptures to Traditional Hetero-femininity and Claiming Power

Lamb (2010; see also Peterson, 2010: 307, 308) raises a complicated question here, is feminine sexual empowerment an internal subjective state or is it an objectively and externally measurable phenomenon? Evidently Lamb's (2010) position is that a subjective sense of empowerment is not enough to constitute real empowerment. Yet, the issue with a view of this kind is that if we conceptualize empowerment as something beyond a subjective sense, who then becomes granted with authority to decide whether someone else is or is not empowered? (Peterson, 2010: 307, 308). Also, the point becomes, what exactly is empowerment? As mentioned earlier on in the thesis, this is an epistemological shortcoming of the literature in this space as there is no solid definition of what constitutes empowerment and, what it encompasses beyond the subjective.

I'd like to make it clear at this point that I do not interpret women's claims to empowerment in the same way that Lamb (2010) does above, i.e., as ineffectively narrow and insufficient to constitute real empowerment. This is something of a risky reading as any power derived from the act of being sexy for someone else, being a sexy object as Lamb (2010: 301) puts it becomes automatically assumed as oppression, as powerlessness. This is a slippery slope to suggesting that sexual power as a consequence of being a sexy object/subject for someone else is artificial empowerment. Are we then, by extension, not implying that modesty, virginity, and chastity are the real measures of a woman's power or worth as a person (Pendleton, 1997; Perrucci, 2000) and whether or not she is good or right heterosexual woman? Ironically, not only does

this view of women's expressions of sexual power in fact deny women their subjectivity and freedom, it assumes that the female body has an essential value that is preserved only when its sexual expression is concealed and guarded, and limits the contexts in which said sexual desire is deemed authentic and appropriate (Perrucci, 2000).

Carole Vance's (1993: 295) analysis of sex panics comes to mind here, in that "panics mobilise fears of social pollution in an attempt to draw firm boundaries between legitimate and deviant individuals and forms of sexuality." Sex panics can be understood as a version of moral panics, describing persistent conflicts over sex with recurrent, structural features (Matthews, 2018). Extending Vance's (1993) logic to apply to these feminist conversations about sexual empowerment then, there seems to be a panic in certain circles as to what constitutes true examples of sexual power and any expressions of power which fall outside the already determined parameters of acceptable feminine sexuality are cast as illegitimate and deviant.

The crucial point here is that seldom has the question been raised as to if and when self-objectification might have other effects than oppression (Vanwesenbeeck, 2009: 270). As Vanwesenbeeck (2007: 270) suggests, the consequence of not asking this question is that we do not know (or offer the space to make it known) if, how, and under what conditions self-sexualization or self-objectification can function to serve the self, to foster autonomy, assertiveness, self-esteem and to serve one's own sexual arousal, and/or satisfaction. Indeed, several women in this study spoke of a sense of sexual power and satisfaction derived from pleasuring their partner during sex and being the sexy, desirable subject. In the subsequent chapters, my analysis of the women's reports of this sexual power have been cautious so as to avoid an overly narrow focus solely on the risks of the young women's reports of their experiences of sexualization as being the sexy object, (a la Gill and Lamb). Rather than making absolutist claims with regards to what constitutes real sexual power, I have endeavoured to remember and reflect that forms of sexual expression can, in a multitude of ways, be viewed as positive experimentation in the service of future desire, subjectivity, and pleasure (Lamb and Peterson, 2012: 705). Recognising that sexual empowerment is not all-or-none in this sense, offers a way to be more comfortable with the fact that women and girls ought to experiment with a variety of ways of being sexual (and being sexually empowered) in order to move in the direction of a healthier sexuality (Peterson, 2010: 313), and for women and girls to recognise their sexual likes and dislikes.

Likewise, I am in agreement with scholars who warn that an interpretation of sexual power, like the one Lamb and Gill et al offer, may in actual fact do a disservice to young women (Meenagh, 2017; Harris and Dobson, 2015; Spencer and Doull, 2015). So, one must urge caution in concluding too quickly; the problem which develops from such a critical reading of women's claims to sexual power is one in which researchers run the risk of undermining the significance and meaningfulness of young women's accounts and expressions (Spencer & Doull, 2015: 908; Meenagh, 2017). The analysis of women's sexual power seen in Gill et al's work for instance, reveals the ways in which a researcher's own interpretation of what symbolises true empowerment can actually work to open up or close down possibilities for agency to emerge (Spencer and Doull, 2015: 908). In their work, Lamb and Peterson (2011; see also, Gavey, 2012) express similar concerns to my own, asking whether researchers can ever really make the strong point, theoretically or directly, that a girl or woman who feels empowered is actually not empowered at all. To me, the simple answer to this seems to be no - we as researchers cannot make this point because subjective experiences and senses of empowerment are real. Peterson (2011: 704, 705) rightly suggests that making this judgement on the behalf of others would give the message that, although women and girls feel empowered, their sense of power is, in fact a false consciousness.

Gavey's (2012) work helpful in this regard. She writes that there is something distasteful about the image of an older adult feminist standing on a pedestal lecturing to girls about sex and sexuality, as if we know all the answers for ourselves let alone for them. Though conversely, is it not an abdication of responsibility not to provide some perspective for younger women? The former though is precisely my thought when analysing the young women's experiences in this thesis: who am I, an outside researcher with no ties to their lives and lived experiences, to determine whether their expressions of power are legitimate? Needless to say, we must always consider the cultural conditions of possibility for women and girls' sexuality, embodiment and relationships (Gavey, 2012: 719). And indeed, there are significant signs in this thesis which point to the ways in which the young women are still required to balance tight tensions between conformity to traditional, restrictive feminine sexual mores on the one hand and more liberated sexual norms on the other. It is for this reason that this thesis takes the view that given these difficult conditions in which young women are negotiating their constructions of their sexual selves, and as heterosexuality is a site of nuance and complexity, we must as researchers, be careful not to dismiss, or totally miss, what may actually be "signs of life" (in terms of sexual agency and power) (Dobson, 2015: 111; Meenagh, 2017: 461).

If, as it has been argued in earlier sections of this chapter, sex and gender are socially constructed entities, constituted through institutional, historical and social practices, then sexual knowledge and sexual experiences cannot be understood independent of their social and cultural context (Peterson, 2010: 309). And so, as Carole Vance (1993: 290) rightly states, this means that simply encouraging a mindless expansion of sexual options (for women), without critiquing the sexist structure in which sexuality is enacted only exposes women to more danger. Empowered sexuality, like all sexuality, is a social construction and thus empowered sexuality will look slightly different for different people, but for us all, our own visions of empowered sexuality do not exist in a vacuum and inevitably will be influenced by cultural, social and historical messaging (Peterson, 2010: 309). Given these many complexities then, perhaps rather than agreeing on a single, unified definition of empowered sexuality, of a "right" way of being an empowered heterosexual woman, it would be beneficial to acknowledge that sexual empowerment is complicated and that it may exist on varying levels and to varying degrees (Peterson, 2010: 309). This is certainly the case for the women interviewed for this study. And taking this view allows us to recognise the micro, individualised moments in which women and girls report feeling sexually empowered, respecting these expressions of power and at the same time acknowledging their location as sometimes existing in cultural, social and historical binds.

In thinking about the need to respect and acknowledge young women's sexual power claims, I am reminded of Heidi Matthews' (2018) work on sexual consent here (important to note though that consent means different things in a legal as opposed to a lived sense. Briefly, Matthews (2018) analyses the limits of consent policies by suggesting the thought that unwanted, or partially wanted, sex can still be, in her words, 'sexy and transformative' insofar as experimenting with pain or fear can shift previously anticipated sexual boundaries precisely because it engages vulnerable states of being. With this considered, Matthews (2018) develops the concept of liminal trust - a space in which partners can explore the value of sexual experiences precisely because they directly engage the line between permissibility and impermissibility. Taking this further, Matthews (2018) explains that sometimes what we want (sexually) is not fully known to us in advance and thus the details of desire and satisfaction are often discovered, and produced, in the sexual moment. The point here is that the actualisation of the sexual self can happen at the same time as degrees of fear and uncertainty as well as excitement and intrigue (Matthews, 2018). It is in these moments of allowing ourselves to engage in intense personal vulnerability that we can, according to Matthews (2018) make space

for the production of liminal trust, a trust not based on consent, but on a shared commitment to embrace the fact that sexual pleasure and danger often occupy the same space. And although sexual liminality encompasses the risk that conduct can cross over into the realm of so-called bad sex, Matthews (2018) considers that it can also be empowering as it acknowledges the potential for sexual encounters to change us, to recreate us, in unplanned ways.

As Matthews (2018) rightly points out, there is promise in these more contemporary debates about the meaning of sex, in that they offer a new area and way in which to theorise about the limits of fulfilling and or fulfilling sex. In line with this, perhaps one can extend these debates to explore the erotic potential (Matthews, 2018) of women's heterosexual encounters. An approach of this kind would work to recognise, and possibly help articulate, the complexity, nuance and ambivalence of women's lived experiences, positioning their desires along a spectrum wherein their power, pleasure, pain, emancipation and victimisation can be communicated in sexual terms (Matthews, 2019: 267, 268). This takes us some distance away from the firm drawing of boundaries between legitimate and deviant expressions of female heterosexuality and the casting of women who fall in the latter category as victims or cultural dupes of the patriarchy. Carole Vance's (1993: 289, 290) notion of "pleasure and danger" can also speak to this complexity. Pleasure and danger illuminates the mix of fear and excitement that women may feel when they approach sexuality (Vance, 1993: 289, 290). Not only this, but it also speaks to the differences among women who, depending on personal history and experience, may want to stress safety or adventure at various times in their lives (Vance, 1993: 289, 290). With regards to this study, the two concepts of liminal trust and pleasure danger can offer a generous framework for understanding different sexual practices and experiences, suggesting that women's relationships to sexuality will be diverse, not singular, and that any feminist view that requires uniformity in women's responses is dishonest and oppressive (Vance, 1993: 289, 290).

Ultimately as Gavey (2010) neatly puts it, we, as researchers, have to pay attention to the voices of young women who may endorse all kinds of different sexual possibilities, including pornographied aesthetics – going back to WAP, for example - and modes of sexual engagement. The view taken in this thesis is that if women and girls tell us researchers that they feel pleasure and empowerment by embracing an overt and exhibitionist version of sexual expression, we should not assume that we know better than they do about the underlying meaning of that expression (Peterson, 2010). Going back then to artists like Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion,

perhaps feeling entitled to, and being able to experience and represent sexual pleasure and desire in a culture that so often restricts women and girl's sexuality could in fact be seen as expression of empowerment. As Ringrose (2008: 54; see also, Harris and Dobson, 2011) argues, perhaps it is not a grand narrative of all or nothing resistance that we can lay claim to but "traces" of feminist, anti-oppressive discourses, which jar against the regulative rhythm of normative discourses and such disjuncture's open up spaces of criticality and insight, becoming small, albeit legitimate, moments of rupture.

2.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to specify the conceptual frameworks within which this thesis sits, illuminating the central concepts which are the foundations of this study. These frameworks – of gender, sex, heterosexuality and femininity - have helped to define some of the central research questions that the rest of this thesis will pose. Namely, how do young, college-aged women explain and understand their lived experiences of heterosexuality with young men? Paying particular attention to their narratives of empowerment, this thesis asks what spaces for agency and empowerment do these young women see in their heterosexual interactions? Finally, I consider how women they navigate safety and risk in heterosex, and how is that they deal with the unpleasant sexual scenario(s)? These questions map on to the subsequent section, chapter 3, which reviews the academic literature I am contributing to, as well as the themes and ideas I explore later on (and attempt to offer original insights about).

Chapter Three - Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine the scholarly work which involves a qualitative exploration of women and girl's heterosexual lived experiences. This section begins with a brief overview of some of the broader studies which have focused on young women's heterosexual experiences alongside other themes (such as hook-up culture for example). Studies of this kind have inspired this thesis and have laid the foundations for it to come about, thus it is important they are signalled here.

Following this, I will consider, in more detail, research which I view as most relevant to my own research questions and I thus situate my own work in relation to these existing studies. My rationale for including these particular studies is that they all take different approaches to the overarching subject matter of women's heterosexual lives. They are also varied in their jurisdictional focus, covering the UK, the USA, Australia and New Zealand. It is my view that in choosing studies which have been undertaken in different locations, one gets a more diverse view of women's experiences of heterosexuality. Further to this, I have endeavoured to refer to a combination of widely cited, larger sample sized studies and smaller scale research which use a sample size similar to one used in this thesis. My reason for this was twofold, firstly, to ignore the well-respected studies with vast samples would be to ignore the kind of research which lays the foundations for studying women's heterosexual experiences (and has inspired the evolution of work like my own). Secondly however, this need to include the fundamental studies, the ones which paved the way so to speak, shouldn't mean the smaller scale studies are overlooked. In fact, in my view, research which uses a smaller sample can be more accessible and often takes a more nuanced approach, blending a focus on heterosexuality with other topics (e.g. Cacchioni's 2000 study which analyses heterosexuality and emotional labour and Mulholland's 2015 research of pornified heterosex). The first two studies (Holland et al's and Phillips) take somewhat of a pessimistic view to young women's heterosexuality, while the following two papers (Allen's and Farvid's) consider women's heterosexual lives with more optimism. The third study meanwhile, speaks to a use of emotion work in analysing young women's experiences of heterosexuality. Monique Mulholland's study of pornified heterosex makes up the forth study. I focus here on Mulholland's (2015: 731) exploration of the ways in which 'pornified' culture prompts new kinds of questions about heterosexual practice, pointing to some interesting transgressive potentials (e.g., young girls agency and freedom). I conclude this

chapter by looking to the more contemporary research conducted recently by Jessie Ford, who considers how interactional theories and gendered sexual scripts contribute to the phenomenon of unwanted sex on campus. A review of all these studies demonstrates the gaps in existing knowledge and the wider contribution of my work, connecting theories – often considered separate from one and other – of empowerment, agency, emotion and safety work. Before beginning an in-depth review of these studies, I will present a view of the literature landscape as it pertains to women's heterosexuality alongside other thematic topics, for example of hook up culture, consent and condom use.

3.2 Women's Heterosexuality Alongside Other Themes

Relatedly to the studies to be reviewed, women's heterosexuality has been analysed alongside other themes. There has been increased attention to, for example, consider young women's negotiations of sexual consent and their ambivalence to sexual encounters, against the backdrop of heterosexuality (Walker, 1997; O'Sullivan and Allgeier, 1998; Kitzinger and Firth, 1999; Impett and Peplau, 2003; Muehlenhard and Peterson, 2005; Gavey, 2005; Beres, 2007; Jozkowski, 2015). For example, O'Sullivan and Allgeier's (1998) study found that women, more so than men, report consenting to unwanted sex for various reasons, because they consider male sexuality to be uncontrollable and as a result of gender roles dictating the need for women to satisfy men's sexual urges. Other scholars have examined condom use, or lack thereof, in hetero-relations (Champman and Hodgson, 1988; Campbell et al, 1992; Holland et al, 1991, 1998; Browne and Minichiello, 1994; Gavey and McPhillips, 1999; Vitellone, 2000; Hickman and Muehlenhard, 2010). Through their research, Holland and colleagues (1991) discovered that condom-less sexual intercourse often signified important meanings such as trust and commitment within hetero-relationships and these meanings overrode the health risks that could come as a consequence of a lack of condom use. While Gavey and McPhillips (1999: 351) argued that there was a dynamic at play in heterosex which rendered some women unwilling and/or unable to introduce and advocate for condom use – describing this as a: "an inexplicable inability to act" and an "unchosen but inescapable passivity that paralyzed them at the necessary moment."

Significant attention has been paid to the heterosexual double standards between women and men, e.g., the dichotomy between labelling women and girls sluts and men and boys studs for the same sexual activity (Lees, 1993; Holland et al, 1998; Crawford and Popp, 2003; Jackson

and Cram, 2003; Ringrose and Renold, 2012; Armstrong et al, 2014; Almazan and Bain, 2015). According to Crawford and Popp (2003: 13) for example, historically men and women have been exposed to different "rules" guiding sexual behaviour, with women being stigmatised for engaging in any sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage, whereas the same behaviour has often been rewarded of men and boys. Crawford and Popp (2013: 13) give the example that boys and men were traditionally expected to "sow their wild oats" while women and girls were faced with a "a Madonna-whore dichotomy" in that they were either pure and virginal or deemed promiscuous and easy. Consistent with this, Jackson and Cram (2003: 113) agree that young women's negotiations of heterosexuality remain dominated by the sexual double standard – of an active, desiring sexuality which is positively regarded in men, but denigrated and regulated by negative labelling in women. In their study analysing young women's talk on negotiating hetero-relationships, Jackson and Cram (2003: 113, 114) discovered that although these double standards still persist, they can potentially be disrupted (in and by, for example, young women's articulations of desire).

However, Jackson and Cram (2003: 124) point out that these methods of resistance to the sexual double standard were, in the case of their research, tenuous. This is because there were not strident voices of opposition to the sexual double standard but rather murmurs, as they call it, that often occurred in an individualised sense (in regards to denigrating male sexual promiscuity and subverted the term "stud" for example) as opposed to a resistance that was organised and collective and thus more widespread among women (Jackson and Cram, 2003: 124, 125). It is precisely this ability to disrupt and carve out moments of sexual freedom that I wanted to investigate further in this thesis, testing, in a sense, whether women still felt constrained in their heterosexuality as a result of the sexual double standards of old or whether they were able to resist these standards in their articulations of pleasure, desire and sexual freedom.

More recently still, academics have begun to analyse heterosexuality in relation to hook up culture on U.S. college campuses (Bogle, 2007; Armstrong et al, 2007; Heldman and Wade, 2010; Garcia et al, 2012; Wade; 2017). Armstrong and colleagues (2007), for example, analyse hook up culture from the view that it can be dangerous for young women – arriving at this perspective because of the pervasiveness of the sexual double standard (as examined prior to this section). Armstrong et al (2007) also suggest that relationship sex might be better for women in terms of sexual satisfaction, given the higher rates of orgasm reported in relationship sex than in hook up sex. Heldman and Wade (2010: 323) meanwhile, analyse how sexual cultures

change and persist, looking specifically at the emergence of hook up culture, how it came to be and where it derived from. They discuss a number of factors which they suggest are the cause for a rise in hook up culture. They point to, among other reasons, college and university policy changes such as the creation of co-educational dormitories which bring women and men closer together and discuss a rise in students putting off establishing monogamous, long term relationships in favour of their careers, thus giving students more ability to take part in more fleeting hook ups (Heldman and Wade, 2010: 327, 329, 330).

Consistent with some of the findings presented later on in this thesis, academics have also considered heterosexuality in relation to women and girl's desires and pleasures (Vance, 1984; Segal, 1994; Jackson, 1995; Hollway, 1996; Jackson and Scott, 2001, 2007; Welles, 2008; Farvid, 2014), whilst some have paid attention exclusively to the phenomenon of faking orgasm (Jackson and Scott, 2001, 2007; Roberts et al, 2005; Jagose, 2010; Fahs, 2014; Wade, 2015; Firth, 2017; Lefrance et al, 2017). The evolution of this kind of feminist work on women's sexuality, orgasm and pleasure can, in fact, be contextualised and historicised in the longstanding debates between feminists and psychoanalysts. Circulating in the 20th century and onwards and setting the terms for a psychoanalytic understanding of women's sexuality was Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* published in 1905. In his work, Freud (1905; see also, Deutsch, 1945; Jackson, 1984; Gerhard, 2000; Potts, 2000, 2002; Colson, 2010) theorised an opposition between vaginal sexuality and orgasm and clitoral sexuality and orgasm, explaining that the former denoted mature, adult female sexuality, while the latter marked a form of immature female development (and consequently those women who did not have vaginal orgasms were deemed frigid).

Much of the rebuttal to these Freudian theories of women's orgasm and sexual pleasure came from feminists who offered alternative theories (sex researchers also discredited Freud's theory of orgasm, see for example Kinsey's 1953 epidemiological study, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female* and most notably, Shere Hite's 1976, *The Hite Report*, a nationwide U.S. study in which she advocates for clitoral orgasm). Feminists began to argue that male experts, like Freud, misunderstood women's sexuality, drawing attention to the masculinist assumptions of the imperative of orgasm by penetration (see also, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* and Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*) (Gerhard, 2000; Jackson, 1984). In *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm* for example, Anne Koedt (1970; see also, Atkinson, 1968; Gerhard, 2000: 450) sought to break out of these male defined notions of female pleasure, making instead the clitoris the site of sexual

expression in women. Koedt (1970; see also, Gerhard, 2000: 450) attempted this by theorising clitoral sexuality as a form of sexual expression not tied to heterosexuality or homosexuality but instead, to a form of female sexuality that lay unaligned to any specific sexual identity or social designation.

Feminist theory has thus long been involved in subverting the valorisation of male centred versions of women's sexuality and orgasm, like that of Freud (Potts, 2002: 72). Feminists have long argued theorists of the Freudian kind, had worked to pathologize women (as well as the clitoris as a deviant form of sexuality) rather than addressing the problem of male indifference to women's desires (Gerhard, 2000: 466). In order to overcome the damage caused by of the work of Freud and others, Koedt in particular subsequently advocated for women becoming full sexual agents, responsible and in control of their own sexual pleasures and desires, declaring that:

"We [women] must discard normal concepts of sex and create new guide-lines which take into account mutual sexual enjoyment […] beginning to demand that if certain sexual positions now de- fined as 'standard' are not mutually conducive to orgasm, they no longer be defined as standard (Koedt, 1970: 46 in Gerhard, 2000: 466)

3.3 Qualitative Research into Women and Girl's Heterosexuality

As I reflect upon in chapter 4, the methods section of this thesis, a researcher's position within the research context may on occasion set limits to, and at the same time may create opportunities for, young people's expressions of power to go unacknowledged as offering the possibility to shift dominant power relations within their lives and relationships (Spencer and Doul, 2015: 908). In the context of the existing studies to be reviewed here, all take different views on young women's experiences of heterosexuality. Some positively develop ideas of female sexual empowerment, while others put it under a more critical lens. Consequently, different researchers take different approaches to women's heterosexual lives and I hope to have conveyed those varying positions here.

With this considered then, in this section I have attempted to cover seven studies in the space of young women's heterosexuality, the first two which offer similar analytical readings of women's sexuality (e.g that their sexualities are significantly constrained by male power, as well as traditional discourses of heterosexuality and that women have little room to mediate these

to experience sexual power, pleasure and desire). The following two studies illuminate a different picture in that while the women participants in these works report experiencing these traditional heterosexual norms, at the same time, they reveal the ways in which they challenge and resist them, thus offering a nuanced depiction of the complexities of young women's heterosexual lives. The fifth study, meanwhile, reflects upon women's experiences of heterosexuality using a different theoretical framework entirely – analysing heterosexuality from an emotional labour frame. The sixth study deals with the emergence of pornified culture and its transgressive potential, paying particular attention to girl's newfound expressions of empowerment. The final seventh study, offers a contemporary contribution to the discussion of young women's heterosexuality, examining the interactional and gender-scripted details of unwanted sexual situations in the college campus context.

There seems to be a gap in the research following these studies, in that there are few recent studies which are dedicated to women's specific experiences of heterosexuality in the last few years. Certainly some recent research has sought to investigate heterosexuality, but these qualitative studies place women's heterosexuality as one aspect of a set of wider themes – as discussed prior to this - of hook up culture on college campuses (e.g. Lisa Wade's 2017 work), the practice of faking orgasm (e.g., Hannah Firth's as well as Monika Lefrance's study both from 2017) and in regards to singledom (Pickens and Braun, 2018). Thus, this thesis fills the existing gap in the literature by, firstly, attempting to concentrate on young women and their experiences, reflections, considerations of their heterosexual lives *as a whole* (as opposed to heterosexuality in relation to another factor, e.g., hook-up culture). But secondly, by considering not only this theme of heterosexual experiences and reflections, but also examining themes of heterosexual power and discourse, agency and empowerment, pleasure, safety and emotional labour. This thesis thus contributes to the existing field in one major way in that it combines an eclectic range of theoretical frameworks to analyse the topic of women's heterosexuality – making for a fuller, more nuanced picture of their experiences.

Due to constraints of space, I am unable to cover *all* studies which analyse young women's lived heterosexual experiences. I consider these 7 to be the ones which best ground my own work, hence my reflection of them here. However, in the introductory chapter of this thesis I mention the work of Fine and Tolman respectively. I consider these studies to paint a similar picture to that of Holland and colleagues and Phillips (the first and second studies to be addressed in detail in this section). Thus, before beginning, and in order to give some background, to set the scene

of the pessimistic picture I am referring to, I will present Fine and Tolman's work briefly before moving on to the five canonical studies.

3.3.1 Fine and Tolman: A Background to the Pessimistic Picture

Fine's 1988 paper documents how sexual education in the U.S.A. ignores young women and girl's sexual desires, presenting instead discourses of sexuality as violence and victimisation (Fine, 1988 cited Muehlenhard and Peterson, 2005: 15). This anti-sex rhetoric had, for Fine (1988: 35; see also, Muehlenhard and Peterson, 2005: 15) consequences outside of the classroom, as she detailed that girls felt ambivalence towards heterosex and were "at once taken with excitement of their anticipated sexuality and consumed with anxiety and worry.". Thus, Fine (2006: 297) argued that schools positioning of young women and girl's as victims of male aggression (through their sexual education programs), seriously compromised young women's development of their sexual subjectivities. Considerable years later, Fine and McClelland (2006: 298) revisited the topic of the missing discourse, setting out that it was, in their words, "as relevant as ever" and thus they expressed continued worry. Their worries continued from the 1988 publication and in revisiting the topic 20 years on, Fine and McClelland (2006: 300, 301) offer a revision to the missing discourse through their conceptualisation of "thick desire." Thick desire refers to the broad range of desires teen girls are entitled to as a way to have meaningful intellectual, social and political engagement, the possibility of financial independence, sexual reproductive freedom, as well as protection from racialised and sexualised violence (Fine and McClelland, 2006: 300, 301). Amending the earlier paper, the authors point to how U.S. federally promoted curricula of abstinence-only sex education constricts the development of this thick desire (Fine and McClelland, 2006: 300, 301).

Deborah Tolman's *Dilemmas of Desire*, meanwhile, gives voice to adolescent girls (on average aged 16 years old) and their experiences of sexual desire (Tolman, 2002; Larson, 2002). Tolman (2002) categorises the girls in her sample according to three different groups which typify their sexual desire. These consist, firstly of the silent or confused girls, who are characterised by the fears of the consequences (such as pregnancy, sexual exploitation or being negatively labelled because of that desire) of sexual behaviour; the second group consists of girls who disclose sexual desires but report actively resisting them due to fear regarding how they will be perceived; and the third group are those which Tolman (2002: 55; see also, Larson, 2002: 9) identifies as desiring sexual subjects who feel entitled to sexual exploration (though Tolman notes these girls also negotiate how to act on these desires without incurring negative consequences). Only 2 of

the 31 girls included in Tolman's (2002: see also, Larson, 2002: 10) study were reportedly able to identify sexual desire as free from any dilemma and as a result, argues that "virtually all of the girls" with whom she interviewed, considered their own sexuality as a dilemma. While the girls in Tolman's (2006: 83, 84; 2006; see also, Larson, 2002) study could identify a double standard (e.g., that teen boys did not experience the same dilemma as themselves), at the same time, they could not understand why it existed and as a consequence, Tolman explains they, "offered the naturalised explanation: that's just the way things are." Collectively then, Tolman's (2002; 2006: 83, 84) study – and by extension the research by Fine (1988; 2006) – convey that for some girls, sexuality is most often not positive, rather it is always complicated by the negative meanings (and quite often real material and social consequences) of their sexuality.

3.3.2 The Male in the Head

Janet Holland, Caroline Ramazanoglu, Sue Sharpe and Rachel Thomson's *The Male in the Head* (1998: 2) is a dominant text in the field of young women's heterosexuality, the authors make sense of young people's sexuality through what they call a "collective feminist effort." The book is the culmination of ten years of empirical research in the UK and was developed from the combination of two projects; the Women, Risk and AIDS Project (WRAP) and the Men, Risk and AIDS Project (MRAP), both of which centred around the fears of the spread of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s. As part of the WRAP, 148 young women aged between 16 and 21 years old were interviewed in London and Manchester from 1988 to 1990 (Holland et al, 1998). In 1991 meanwhile, and in London only, 46 young men of the same age were interviewed as part of the MRAP (Holland et al, 1998: 2).

In both of these qualitative studies Holland and colleagues (1998: 3) aimed to build up a picture of the sexual practices, beliefs and understandings of young people to document and subsequently interpret the following four points; first, on young people's understanding of HIV and STIs, secondly, their conception of danger and risk in sexual activity, thirdly, the approaches that the young people had towards relationships and consequently any responsibilities within these relationships, and finally, young people's ability to communicate about safety within sexual relationships. From this, Holland et al's (1998: 3) analysis contributed to the development of the theoretical view that sexuality was/is a socially constructed entity. As mentioned above, the authors' analysis was grounded in a feminist approach as well as a more general sociological analysis of the "sexual politics of everyday dangers, desires, excitements, boredoms, risks and pleasures that young people experienced" (Holland et al, 1998:3).

Feminism in, *The Male in the Head*, is considered to be an "unstable and contested political construction" which is grounded in a sense of women – across social divisions – having some common political interests and a notion of justice that sees male power over women as unjust (Holland et al, 1998: 14). Heterosexuality on the other hand is regarded as a social construction with interrelated layers/levels of power through which young people emerge as sexually active agents (Holland et al, 1998: 22, 23). Consequently, Holland and colleagues (1998: 22, 23) identify five heterosexual power layers/levels through which sexual interactions emerge: language, agency and action, structured and institutionalised power relations, embodied practices and their meanings and finally, historically specific and subject to change. In developing these interacting layers and levels of power, Holland et al (1998: 22, 23) claim that the heterosexuality imposed on young people in their study was male dominated. As a result, this male power was constituted simultaneously at and through all the analytical layers/levels:

> Young people embark on their first sexual encounters and relationships in social situations in which male domination is the norm. Young men are confronted by the constraints of 'normal' masculinity, while young women come under pressure to be conventionally feminine and to contain their social being within tightly prescribed social spaces (Holland et al, 1998: 23).

In their findings, Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe and Thomson (1998: 5) express being "struck by the contradictions" in young women's accounts, noting particular discrepancies between expectations and experience, as well as intention and practice. For example, the young women in their study were reportedly concerned about sexual health (in the form of a loss of sexual reputation, possible pregnancy and STIs) and they thus wanted to have safe sex, but failed to fulfil their intentions, with most revealing that they were having unprotected sex often (Holland et al, 1998: 5). It was from an exploration of sexual health risks such as these that Holland and colleagues (1998) observed accounts of gendered inequalities and the extent of male dominance, as they considered the young women to be negotiating within structurally unequal heterosexual relationships. For the women involved in Holland and colleagues (1998: 6) work, femininity was an unsafe identity. The authors give evidence for this by concluding:

> To be 'conventionally' feminine is to be sexually unknowing, to aspire to a relationship which makes men happy […] women have to discipline their unruly bodies into conformity with male desires (Holland et al, 1998: 6, 8).

It is for this reason that Holland et al (1998: 10) posit that heterosexuality is not masculinity and femininity in opposition, rather "it *is* masculinity." Hence, femininity is constructed within heterosexuality and on, in their words, "a male territory" (Holland et al, 1998: 10). From this depiction of femininity and masculinity within heterosexuality, Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe and Thomson developed the now sociologically prominent concept, the "male-in-the-head":

> The male-in-the-head indicates the surveillance power of a male-dominated heterosexuality that is institutionalised […] disciplining young people's behaviour through a double standard of sexual reputation (Holland et al, 1998: 157).

The basic argument of the male-in-the-head reiterates some of the past feminist thought on the conventionally gendered and heteronormative patterns of behaviour, in that the male sex drive is active, natural and intrinsic to masculinity, yet femininity is constructed as passive and emotional (Hoskins, 2000). As one young woman in Holland et al's study explains:

> The girl is not meant to want sex, even if she does, she's not meant to say that she does, but I mean a boy, he's meant to be more dominant – 'I want sex' – you know, cave-man type thing (Holland et al, 1998: 159).

Female desire in the account above is not totally denied, however it certainly is silenced (Holland et al, 1998: 159). Indeed, the quote above has real links to this thesis, as the women involved in this research spoke of a similar biologically imbedded masculine heterosexuality causing female desire being, at times, overridden. I examine this in more detail in chapter 5, *Constructions of Pleasure and Desire,* and extend Holland et al's (1998) work here with new analysis to my own findings. As part of the male-in-the-head then, Holland et al (1998: 159) reason women, and by extension femininity, to be colluding with their male partners in reproducing male power. Young women in Holland et al's (1998: 10) research were living feminine identities but *in relation to* a male audience, thus measuring themselves through the male gaze - male-in-the-head. The consequence of these gendered and heterosexualized patterns of behaviour was

that women were unable to insist upon safer sexual practices and that women's pleasure was excluded from intimate experiences (Hoskins, 2000).

Holland et al (1998) conclude that there was no equivalent of a female-in-the-head for young men and the few examples of resistance to the male-in-the-head were significantly limited in their study. Accordingly, we can perhaps interpret Holland and colleagues (1998: 117; see also, Gill, 2007, 2008) reading of women's experiences of empowerment as pessimistic, and in line with work critical of postfeminism - e.g. the view that there has been a shift from objectification to subjectification and sexual gains are achieved through an active feminine heterosexuality - as the authors analyse the young women to be *seeking* power by employing a range of different contradictory strategies to gain control over the meanings and practices of their heterosexual relationships. In my view, this is something of a shortcoming of Holland et al's (1998: 128) work as they seem to be over-interpreting (and over-scrutinising) women's claims to empowerment to such a degree that only one woman - of the four whose accounts they analyse in chapter 7, *Empowering Women* - Tina, is regarded as the woman subverting male power successfully. Tina, for example, is described as "successfully engaging with masculinity and femininity as a strategy to secure sexual safety, pleasure and empowerment for herself and her partners" (Holland et al, 1998: 128). I would suggest that what is missing from their analysis is an acceptance that, and respect for, women who genuinely enjoy and desire being the submissive sexual partner. Rather Holland and colleagues make somewhat of a broad statement in relation to the women's stories, explaining that there is:

> No indication of any clear progression from less to more empowered […] there is no simple equation between safer sex, resistance and the process of empowerment" (Holland et al, 1998: 130, 131).

However, as Hoskins (2000) rightly asks, Why can't these expressions – and by extension young women's experiences - be considered and valued for what they (the women) say they are? And why can't these women's stories be used as a starting point to help other young people gain the most out of their heterosexual experiences? (Hoskins, 2000). Moreover, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, there seems to be a narrow view of approved sexually empowering behaviour as part of Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe and Thomson's, *The Male in the Head.* For example, only Tina, as mentioned, is deemed successful in her heterosexual relationships as she explains gaining sexual pleasure and sexual safety in multiple sexual experiences (Hoskins, 2000: 148;

Holland et al, 1998: 117). This narrow view of the, potentially, appropriate way for women to exercise sexually empowering behaviour is seen when Tina describes that her pleasure is not just derived from penetration but through other intimate experiences that she teaches her men to participate in (Hoskins, 2000: 145; Holland et al, 1998: 117). It is because of this limited view that I consider the discussion of successful or unsuccessful sexual empowerment as a limitation of the study.

3.3.3 Flirting with Danger

Two years on from *The Male in the Head*, Lynn Phillips in *Flirting with Danger* (2000) sought to understand how college aged women in the United States construct their sexual experiences. By means of a multi-method approach, in-depth interviews (30) and group discussions (with 6 women, once a week for four weeks) - Phillips (2000: 32) sought to "honour women's voices and shed light on their complex experiences of sexuality, agency and male aggression." Phillips (2000: 19) concentrated specifically on the ways in which the diverse young women in her sample developed sexual subjectivities in a culture which she suggests is "saturated by contradictory discourses of heterosexuality, love and male aggression." Phillips' (2000: 15) study is feminist in nature, she identifies an important need to maintain the gains made by feminist activism and research while "speaking faithfully" as she words it, to the textures and contradictions in women's stories. Phillips (2000: 15) is careful to do this without "fuelling dominant assumptions which hold women responsible for their own mistreatment", she considers this vital so as not to erase women's realities. To appreciate the young women's accounts and the meanings within them, Phillips (2000: 15) places emphasis on the socially constructed nature of subjectivity, sexuality, power and choice by engaging in discourse analysis and discussing discourse from a theoretical perspective.

Using a Foucauldian interpretation of discourse, Phillips (2000: 15) elucidates that discourses in the case of her work, promote certain values and perspectives while marginalising others - discourses tell the reader, in her view, what is natural, desirable, appropriate behaviour. Taking into consideration the social construction of subjectivity, power and choice as well as sexuality, the author endeavours to interpret her participant's accounts against a backdrop of the powerful and contradictory cultural messages they encounter (Phillips, 2000: 22).

For example, across the qualitative analysis in *Flirting with Danger,* Phillips (2000: 36) notes the subtle and sometimes more overt societal messages which dictated, in a conflicting manner,

how young women should act, what they should expect from men, from themselves and from their heterosexual relationships. Phillips (2000: 37) identified these messages as clustering around four dominant themes: how to be a good woman, what constitutes 'normal' male sexual behaviour, what it means to be a 'real' victim and what should be expected of men and hetero-relationships. Consequently, these themes gave rise to four conflicting pairs of discourses: the pleasing woman and together woman discourse (which reflected the theme of what it meant to be a good woman); the normal/danger and male sexual drive discourse (which fell under what constituted 'normal' male heterosexuality/behaviour); heterosexuality, female victimisation and the true victim discourse (relating to the theme of what is true, real sexual victimisation); and lastly, the discourses of love hurts and love conquers all (to characterise the overall nature of heterosexual relationships) (Phillips, 2000: 37).

I will outline two of these discourses in more detail here, the pleasing woman discourse and the together women discourse. Both of these are most relevant to this thesis as the women interviewed expressed similar narratives as present in their heterosexual lives. The former, the pleasing woman discourse illuminated how the young women in Phillips (2000: 39) study reported spending considerable energy in positioning themselves as desirable to men – a desirability which proved their worth. Phillips (2000: 39) categorised the women in her study to be acting in selflessness, as they often expressed the ways in which they would tailor their appearance and behaviours to the desires of men, refraining from being a sexual subject with desires of their own. Competing with this discourse was that of the together woman, whereby the author described her participants adhering to the notion that a so-called 'together' woman is free, sexually sophisticated and entitled to accept nothing less than full equality and satisfaction in her sexual and romantic encounters (Phillips, 2000: 47). This mirrors a postfeminist perspective regarding women's sexual freedom, the idea that women's sexual empowerment is purely sexual objectification and repackaging of gendered norms of old. Phillips (2000: 47) explains that her sample found these messages of a "together woman" in the media, in girls' conversations with friends and in films. She notes the participants often found this discourse "intriguing" as they, in her view, wanted to aspire to be grown-up and independent (Phillips, 2000: 47).

Again, as is the case with Holland and colleagues *The Male in the Head* (1998) there seems to be a heavy emphasis on women who find these discourses of a pleasing and together woman intriguing for two complex reasons; not only because, perhaps, they want a sense of

independence but also because they see the possibility of sexual encounters as exciting. Nevertheless, Phillips (2000) viewed the women as attempting to make decisions - and make sense of them - according to these competing discourses, concluding that there was an absence of discourse related either to male accountability or to female pleasure without penalties. This might be true at times, but an overly critical analysis of these women's claims of empowerment seems to be creeping in. For example, in Chapter 5 of *Flirting with Danger*, Phillips views women who experienced a sexual encounter voluntarily and with pleasure as:

> Appearing to expend considerable energy finding ways to vie for position in their sexual experiences […] Once involved in hetero-relational encounters, the young women relied on three main strategies – becoming a desiring object, playing with fire and being the one who can change him - to find meaning and claim empowerment in interactions that could otherwise threaten their safety, agency or personal integrity. With each strategy, women took elements of hetero-relations that might be frightening or demeaning and *attempted* to transform them into something chosen and desirable (Phillips, 2000: 125, emphasis added).

My main critique here is the use of "attempted" in relation to something reportedly chosen and viewed as empowering. Why is this an *attempted* and thus false transformation of desire? Can this not be a nuanced and authentic experience transformation if the women consider it to be such? Phillips (2000: 123) goes on to explain that in her view, personal feelings of strength and autonomy may mask a lack of sociocultural empowerment or access to the resources and status necessary to fulfil ones needs. Phillips (2000: 129) may well be right, however, when she states that this power can sometimes be contingent on men's judgements of women's desirability and that the discourse of a masculine sex drives posits that once aroused men cannot be controlled.

Of course, we ought to exercise some caution in removing women's experiences from their wider sociocultural context, but it might be the case that the women in Phillips' (2000) study and their claims of empowerment are more obviously nuanced and juxtaposed than she suggests. What I mean is, these experiences may well exist within traditional heterosexual discourses, but they are still assertions of power, pleasure and agency, and women should not be judged according to how *effective* they are in wielding this power. How can it be determined so vehemently, as Phillips (2000) does, that empowerment of the kind seen here does not translate to any power at all? The problem is that through an analysis of the kind that Phillips

(2000) offers, we are in a sense editing out young women's sexual histories and experiences that do not conform to a 'correct' notion of agentic feminist heterosex (Hollibaugh, 1989). Simply put, an arousal of power rooted in being attracted to older men or pleasure arising from the performance of a carefully crafted sexually desired persona is not some kind of false consciousness, it *is* a form of power and pleasure. As I have tried to demonstrate earlier on in this chapter and go on to analyse in the discussion chapter of this thesis, we, as researchers, ought to be careful to not read sexual empowerment from a neoliberal, lean-in feminist perspective which, informed by capitalism and the idea of the consumer, reframes women's liberation now in extremely individualistic terms, consequently ceasing to raise the spectre of social or collective justice (Rottenberg, 2014: 240, 244). However, we should exercise the same caution in analysing women's power-claims from a top-down, "fragile", women-as-victims angle.

Instead, perhaps we could consider the view that young heterosexual women's accounts of the micro, interpersonal dynamics of power, like the ones that some women in Phillips' (2000) study report, can simultaneously operate inside/around/outside hetero-traditional discourses and nevertheless are authentic and crucially complex evidence of experiences of power. There is an indubitable impact of heteronormative and male discursive power in women's heterosexual lives; but at the same time there exist avenues to mediate this through young women's own claims to power. If a woman recognises these constraints but still feels a sense of power crafted from her sense of herself as a desiring subject, why should we refute her expressions of power here? Of course, this sense of power might well be influenced by discourses of traditionally attractive heterosexual femininity but that doesn't make it invalid.

It seems to me that some women's claims of empowerment are in fact speaking, once more, to Carole Vance's (1989) notion of "pleasure and danger." As Vance (1989: 17) makes it clear, any exclusive focus on women's danger (and by extension their fragility), only makes women's actual experience with pleasure invisible as danger is overstated until it monopolises the frame and does not empower women or acknowledge the value of women's curiosity, desire, adventure and success. A more critical reading might then be one which does not consider women's power and pleasure as *always* operating along unstable and unsuccessful lines but rather as existing in and through a multiplicity of discourses and thus part of a *field* of possibilities which, through reflexivity, can disrupt the traditional discourses and bring alternative ones (of danger, transformation, power, pleasure, desire), to light (Powell, 2010).

3.3.4 Girls Want Love, Boys Want Sex

Louisa Allen's 2003 article, *Girls Want Love, Boys Want Sex: Resisting Dominant Discourses of Heterosexuality*, is an empirical study looking in the context of New Zealand, exploring the discursive production of subjectivities in young people's – 17 to 19 year olds - talk about their sexual selves (Allen, 2003; 216). Using a combination of focus groups, couple interviews, one-on-one interviews and a questionnaire, Allen (2003: 217) gathered data from a large sample of 515 participants in an attempt to elicit different "stories" dependent upon the context in which they were produced. Informed by feminist methodology and Foucault's notion of the possibility of resistance in relation to the discursive construction of young people's sexual subjectivities, Allen's (2003: 216) study determines whether and how young people's talk about their sexual selves resists dominant meanings about heterosexuality.

As reflected in the previous two studies covered in this chapter, Allen's (2003: 216) view is one which considers discourses as making available particular subject positions - certain ways-of-seeing the world and certain ways-of-being in the world - and when these are taken up, there are particular implications for subjectivity and experience. Allen's (2003: 215) overarching conclusion is that young people speak about their sexuality in ways that both conform and deviate from traditional constructions of male and female heterosexualities, thus she acknowledges that young people speak about themselves as sexual subjects in complex ways. With regards to the conformity to heterosexual discourses then, Allen (2003) observes similar findings to those of Holland et al (1998) as well as Phillips (2000). In drawing on these discourses, young women in Allen's study were:

> positioned as sexually vulnerable and less easily pleasured than young men, victim to male sexual gratification and more interested in the emotional aspects of physical intimacy. They subsequently appeared as the subordinate partner in heterosexual relationships who was 'acted upon', rather than 'acting' (Allen, 2003: 218).

As part of these traditional or conventional heterosexual discourses, the young women's talk generally conveyed wanting deep emotional connection, love for example as opposed to sex, from their partner (Allen, 2003: 219). Though, perhaps the most crucial part of Allen's (2003: 219) study is that despite the prevalence of young women constructing themselves in ways that observed the traditional discourses of heterosexual femininity, these were not the *only* ways in

which young women constituted their sexual selves in their narratives. In fact, a significant number of women in Allen's (2003: 219) research drew on discourses which resisted these dominant meanings of femininity. Allen (2003: 219) suggests, despite the neoliberal, individualistic leanings of these discourses, contemporary meanings about 'girl power', for example, offered young women the possibility of being positioned as active and desiring sexual agents.

Other women, meanwhile, resisted the subject positions offered by the sexual double standard by adopting the usually derogatory vocabularies such as slut, whore and slag in a more positive sense in order to describe themselves, defying the negative social connotations of such talk and invoking a complex accommodation to the subject positions of these vocabularies (Allen, 2003: 221). Like some of the women interviewed for this thesis, women in Allen's (2003: 222) research also drew on discourses which legitimised their sexual desire as normal, resisting being positioned according to the sexual double standard and contesting the image of young women as sexually passive, uninterested in sexual contact. Instead, the young women in Allen's (2003: 222) research spoke of passion and pleasure as normal expressions and experiences of their sexuality.

Nonetheless, Allen (2003: 223) points out that a sexual double standard was still present as part of young women's reflections and thus due to their "need to safeguard their sexual reputations, talk about female desire and pleasure occurred mainly in environments where young women felt they would not be negatively stigmatised." Despite this, the study gives us, at this point in our discussion, a somewhat refreshing view of young women's heterosexuality. Allen (2003: 223) concludes that for young people in her study, the notion that young women are submissive, passive and only want deep connection from relationships, while young men prefer sex is dated.

Arguably, conceptualisations such as that of Holland and colleagues (1998) as well as Phillips (2000) which are overly negative about women's sexual agency and empowerment, fail to capture the complexity, and reality, of young people's constitution of their sexual selves (Allen, 2003: 231, 232). While many of the women part of Allen's (2003: 231, 232) research did draw on the dominant discourses of heterosexuality in their talk, a significant amount also provided more complex oppositions to these constructions of heterosexuality. What is most important about Allen's 2003: 323) study is that it makes the case for a need to acknowledge that young

people's sexual subjectivities are nuanced in that they do not always neatly conform to traditional notions of passive female and active male (hetero)sexuality. Allen thus explains that:

> Recognising this is important for the way in which educational messages and strategies might tap into young people's sense of themselves as sexual subjects. For example, strategies that presuppose young women's lack of sexual desire or which ignore young men's aspirations for love may miss the mark, as they do not encapsulate some young people's conceptualization of their sexuality (Allen, 2003: 232).

3.3.5 Oh, it was Good Sex!

Panteá Farvid's 2014 project, *Oh it was Good Sex!* is an examination of 15 young women's experiences of heterosexual casual sex from a feminist, social constructionist standpoint (Farvid, 2014). Through, what she calls, a double layered method of analysis (e.g. locating her interest in women's stories, as well as the ideas, assumptions and discourses which informed what they shared) Farvid (2014: 123) documented how young women's talk of heterosexual causal sex seemed to demonstrate moments of resistance, contradiction and constraint. She recognised the ways in which the participants, aged between 19 and 25 years of age, were reworking traditional discourses and constructions of female pleasure and desire while at the same time they were constrained in their articulations of what it was that pleasurable experiences consisted of (Farvid, 2014: 123).

Through her semi-structured interviews, Farvid (2014: 124, 125) found the women in her research were comfortable in articulating sexual desire in positive ways. Her participants often spoke of casual sex as good, fun and as an acceptable practice for them to engage in (Farvid, 2014: 124, 125). Interestingly, most women positioned themselves as individuals who had, in the past, "bought into" more traditional notions of female sexuality, considering causal sex as wrong and associating sex only as part of a committed relationship (Farvid, 2014: 124, 125). Becoming older contributed to the young women changing their understandings of casual sex, as they considered their views to have developed significantly over time (Farvid, 2014: 124, 125). Of course, this factor may well, more simply be associated with maturity and its natural process – we change our views as we age, and individuals change their views at different stages of their lives.

Other women in Farvid's (2014: 126) study reflected upon having casual sex because of their physical attraction towards men and not for intimacy, for love or in pursuit of a relationship. Thus sex for these women was not constructed for its emotional intimacy, rather as sex for sex sake (Farvid, 2014: 125). Farvid (2014: 126) points out here that this implied the women were rejecting any evocation of romantic discourse (Farvid references Hollway's have/hold discourses here), as the women made it clear they were not interested in romantic relations and in the process resisted the dominant discourses of femininity.

Alongside this, the women expressed actively pursuing causal sex, positioning themselves as active desiring subjects and casual sex here was sought on their own terms for the sake of an, ideally, pleasurable sexual experience (Farvid, 2014: 126). Farvid's (2014: 127) participants positively reframed sexual desire as something they possessed, signalling promising counter stories of them as active, desiring sexual subjects and thus carving our moments of resistance to traditional feminine heterosexuality. In considering these women's explanations here, in particular of having a high sex drive, the authors analysis and critique is astute:

> Most women described themselves as enjoying sex and this was the reason for them engaging in casual sex. In doing this they were acting outside feminine norms and in direct opposition to the female as passive. But at the same time, their desire for sex was managed in was way that did not disrupt the traditional femininity. In describing their desire for sex as "natural" and by saying "I have a high sex drive" they present themselves as unusual, an outlier and an exception, thus the dominant discourses of feminine heterosexuality go undisturbed and biological male desire is applied to women, consequently failing to rework the gender order (Farvid, 2014: 128).

What I appreciate most about Farvid's (2014) critique above is that she strikes an important balance between proving that women can and are able to rupture the traditional heterosexual discourses and carve out powerful sexual situations through casual sex. Still though she acknowledges the women are acting (through no fault of their own) within these heterosexual orders, applying old discourses to their present actions. Farvid (2014) interprets the women's talk in a way which respects and affirms their own claims of empowerment as real, but locates them as acting at times within wider heteronormative constraints. She does this sympathetically, which is crucial, thus Farvid (2014) does not fall into the potentially simplistic analysis of these women as cultural dupes of the patriarchy.

Nevertheless, Farvid (2014: 129) goes on to deduce that women had difficulty in describing what made sex physically pleasurable and attributes this to the women having a lack of discursive resources available for them to articulate what it is that is so sexually pleasing. Farvid (2014: 132) references the women being unable to directly talk about what sexual practices made causal sex for them so enjoyable, some women describe it as "good sex" (hence the title of the article), others note that the men they were having sex with were doing things that "girls like." As a result, the author considers the women were implying that pleasurable sex was something they were given based on men's skills, rather than something they produced themselves, hence she argues some of the women were subtly occupying a passive sexual subjectivity with regards to pleasure in casual sex (passive in the sense that they shied away from describing exactly what it was that made sex pleasurable) (Farvid, 2014: 132).

I am not convinced of Farvid's (2014) reading here, for who is to know what sexual subjectivity these women were occupying and therefore how can it be concluded that the women were passive rather than showing the men what they enjoyed and found pleasurable? I tend to think that their inability to articulate what it was that they enjoyed about sex physically may well be due to embarrassment at discussing the minute details of sex and sexual acts with an unfamiliar researcher. Though I in no way intend to criticise the author's interview technique or critically assess her rapport with her participants, clearly the women she spoke to were very comfortable with her presence as a researcher. However, it seems a shortfall of her paper to not consider this possibility, given that sex is somewhat taboo and can be difficult to discuss in detail. The women may well have spoken about the physical details of their experiences differently with a close friend than with a stranger simply out of a feeling of familiarity and ease. For example, I observed that when the women in my study spoke of particular sex acts and foreplay, there was a sense of embarrassment among the group and a difficulty in finding the words to articulate their thoughts. Farvid does explain that when sexual pleasure was discussed, it was hinted that it revolved around oral sex and that:

> In talk about pleasure, orgasm was offered as one of the main pleasurable aspects of a sexual encounter. However, what should be avoided, and in an interest of promoting plural sexual pleasures that are not always genital focused, is an automatic conflation with orgasm (only) with sexual pleasure […] orgasm should not be taken as the only signifier that sexual pleasure has taken place (Farvid, 2014: 135).

Farvid's (2014: 137) article still makes the case that heterosexual women are engaging in moments of resistance whereby they are working to reconstruct the traditional feminine heterosexuality and provide counter narratives of a desirous, powerful female sexuality. As a result of this, Farvid (2013: 135) encourages feminist researchers in the field to acknowledge that female heterosexuality is, to an extent, shifting, in Western culture at least. Feminists working in the area of young women's heterosexual stories, reflections and experiences thus, in her view, need to be engaged in, and by extension, welcome this reconstruction of women's heterosexuality in order to avoid sexist formulations prevailing (Farvid, 2014: 135). I agree with Farvid (2014) here and my concern with some of the other work covered in this chapter is that, in constructing women as having a "male-in-the-head" (Holland et al, 1998) or ignoring their claims to power through an analysis of them being dupes of traditional heteroculture (Phillips, 2000), are we not simply reproducing the sexist gender order of old, that of women as submissive, passive and dominated? Additionally, theories such as these from Holland et al (1998) and Phillips (2000) fail to reflect upon and consider why women make entirely different decisions.

Farvid (2014: 136) posits that what is needed is a reconceptualization of such discourses and the cultivation of alternative discourses when it comes to female desire, opening up a space to explore women's understandings of their own sexualities. As stated in chapter two, sexuality ought to be conceptualised as fluid, contextual, situational and unbound by gender (Farvid, 2014: 136). As Farvid (2014: 136, 137) suggests, female heterosexuality thus needs to be discussed and represented much more often in ways that challenge conventional heteronormativity, and women need to be able to embrace the intricate ways of talking about sex, desire and pleasure. In sum, reflexively thinking about sexual experiences, about our desires and the desires of others, of what is and is not enjoyable about sex, can offer a way for women to strive for a more considered sexuality (Farvid, 2014: 137; Beres and Farvid, 2010).

3.3.6 Heterosexuality and the Labour of Love

I will now reflect on a study which analyses women's heterosexual lives using the theoretical framework of sex work (by this I mean an extension of Arlie Hochschild's concept of emotional labour rather than prostitution) found in Cacchioni's (2007) "Heterosexuality and the Labour of Love." Having explored the operation of power and discourse in the previous studies, examining the research on emotion/sex work here offers an insight into how these concepts of

power, discourse, agency and emotion work will blend together in this thesis to inform my analysis of young women's experiences and offer an original contribution to the literature by combining multiple theoretical frameworks that have yet to be used together to analyse new empirical findings.

Thea Cacchioni's (2007) article, "Heterosexuality and the Labour of Love", examines the work that women do in an effort to improve their heterosexual lives, in light of debates, around Cacchioni's time of writing, on Female Sexual Dysfunction. Cacchioni's (2007) empirical study is grounded in in-depth interviews with 31 women, all of whom identified themselves as having a range of sexual problems, based in the Vancouver Canada area. Her study includes women's accounts of women engaging in methods of disciplining and subsequently monitoring their sexual responses and consequently, Cacchioni (2007) develops the concept "sex work" to examine these phenomena.

In her developing the concept of sex work, Cacchioni is influenced by Duncombe and Marsden's research conducted in 1996. Duncombe and Marsden (1996) initially used the notion of sex work to conceptualise women's engagement with the rationalisation, improvement and mastery of sexual pleasure in their personal heterosexual relationships. Cacchioni (2007) models her concept – as Duncombe and Marsden (1996) have done – on Arlie Hochschild's (1983) characterisation of emotional labour. In doing so, Cacchioni (2007: 301) employs sex work to infer the unacknowledged effort and monitoring that women are expected to devote in order to manage their and their partner's sexual desires and activities. Using this concept Cacchioni's (2007: 301, 302) empirical study attempts to reveal why women undertake sex work, highlighting the relevance of ideological and material contextual factors (e.g. an interpersonal imbalance of power such as participants who were financially dependent on their partners) and connecting these to wider gender relations.

Cacchioni (2007) interpreted sex work in her research to be located in a wider context of heteronormative discourses, similar to the ones previously discussed in this chapter. Cacchioni (2007: 307) notes that the women involved in her qualitative study engaged in three distinct types of sex work in order to achieve what they viewed as "normal" heterosexuality. Cacchioni (2007) identified these types of sex work to consist of activities clustered around discipline work, performance work and avoidance work. The first, discipline work, involved participants changing their mental and physical responses to heterosexual practices (Cacchioni, 2007: 307,

308). Women who acted in this way were, in Cacchioni's (2007: 308) view, on a "quest to implement certain skills and/or a degree of concentration to manipulate their body and mind." Consequently, participants engaging in discipline work as a part of sex work were disciplining the way they responded to sexual prompts and this was often encouraged and advised by Gynaecologists, GP's and therapists (Cacchioni, 2007: 308). Performance work meanwhile involved "faking it" by employing a range of techniques, such as faking orgasm, pretending to enjoy otherwise painful sex, performing an idealised version of femininity and being acutely concerned with their appearance during sex (Cacchioni, 2007: 308, 309). Lastly, avoidance work involved clear strategies which the women explained using in order to evade having sex all together (e.g., falling asleep before their partner, pretending they were busy with household tasks, pretending they were menstruating) (Cacchioni, 2007: 309).

However, some women involved in Cacchioni's (2007: 310) study made what she regarded to be "sexual lifestyle changes" as an alternative strategy used in opposition to sex work. These changes challenged the normative definitions of sex and at times defied the overall importance of heterosexual activity (Cacchioni, 2007: 310). For some of Cacchioni's (2007: 310, 311) participants these lifestyle changes involved exploring their bisexuality and even embracing their asexual identity. Some participants, meanwhile, challenged heteronormativity and felt a sense of liberation as a consequence of being newly single following divorce (Cacchioni, 2007: 310, 311)

Nevertheless, for those women in Cacchioni's (2007: 312) study who did express engaging in forms of sex work, this often occurred due to material factors. For example, some women revealed how they were financially reliant on their partner and therefore, were less likely to make sexual lifestyle changes in fear of financial insecurity (Cacchioni, 2007: 313). From these women's perspective, the material 'costs' outweighed the 'benefits' that might be gained through having greater freedom to express themselves sexually (Cacchioni, 2007: 312, 313). Other women meanwhile expressed a duty – similar to one described in this thesis – to satisfy the male sexual drive (Cacchioni, 2007: 314). However, for Cacchioni's (2007: 315) participants this often stemmed from past experiences of violence, and thus not taking part in sex for these women risked exposure to that same physical, sexual and mental abuse once more.

As Cacchioni (2007: 316) herself concludes, "Heterosexuality and the Labour of Love" contributes to debates surrounding the social construction of sexuality and more specifically, to

the role of discourses in shaping sexual practises as compared to the role of material inequalities in informing such activities. Cultural, heterosexual discourses, similar to those seen later on in this thesis (such as that of the male sexual drive) were evident in the majority of Cacchioni's (2007: 316) participant accounts of why it was that they were distressed about sexual difficulties. Cacchioni (2007: 316) quotes Jackson (1999) in noting that a "sexual revolution in the bedroom will not take place without a concurrent revolution in the sexual division of labour and the end of male violence." Consequently, Cacchioni (2007: 316) brings together the importance of both concepts of emotion/sex work and the theories of power and agency covered in past empirical research in this chapter, as she concludes that one of the major reasons why women are expected to take part in sex work is that socio-economic and sexual equality with men has not yet been fully realised. Research which explores and develops the concept of emotional labour will later tie in with a central question that this research posits; namely, how is it that young women manage unpleasant sexual situations. In chapter six, 'women speaking to the dangers', I build on work like that of Cacchioni's to produce an original insight to conclude that self-work is present in the young women's heterosexual encounters and that there are three strands of such work that the women interviewed in this thesis can be seen to engage in.

3.3.7 Walking a Fine Line

The penultimate study to be considered here is Monique Mulholland's, 'Walking a Fine Line: Young People Negotiate Pornified Heterosex'. Mulholland's (2015) research is relevant to this thesis in that it considers how the acts of heterosexual practice are changing shape, and how the normalisation of heterosexual pornography in particular, contributes to girl's newfound expressions of empowerment. Mulholland (2015; see also, Mulholland, 2011; 2013) thus studies how the emergence of 'pornified' culture (meaning a wide range of highly hetero-sexualised visual representational practices and products across popular culture) prompts new kinds of questions about heterosexual practice, pointing to some interesting transgressive potentials. Mulholland (2015: 731) ponders some of the following questions in her research, such as what happens when a historically non-normative form of public sexual expression attains a measure of social acceptability? Does this alter the nature of public heterosexual practice, which casts non-hidden porn as 'scary', 'bad' and disrespectable? (Mulholland, 2015: 734). In order to explore these questions, Mulholland (2015: 731) draws on a qualitative empirical study (using discussion based activities in whole-classroom spaces) with young people aged 12–16 in South

Australian schools. With the young people involved in her study, Mulholland (2015: 731) discussed the apparent normalisation and ready accessibility of porn.

The young people's narratives suggest that pornified culture works as a moment for curious exploration, what Mulholland (2015: 732) calls a fun, fleshy spectacle. Across all of the activities carried out with students, Mulholland (2015: 737) observed that the students seemed comfortable in speaking about pornified and explicit sex in ways that signalled a shift in its position as perverse, deviant, or shameful. The students involved in Mulholland's (2015: 739) research presented porn and the pornified aesthetic as routine and familiar - porn was very much part of their cultural world.

Relevant to this thesis is Mulholland's (2015: 741) observation of the subversive possibility - emerging from this normative acceptance of heterosexual porn. Thinking specifically here of newfound expressions of freedom, agency and empowerment, particularly for girls (Mulholland, 2015: 741). For example, girls in Mulholand's (2015: 741) study were comfortable in making sexual assessments and talking openly about porn and this, in her view, suggested a shift whereby for girls, respectability can mean an active and overt sexuality. This new-found acceptability granted to porn may be associated with a body politics in which pleasure and fun are allowable, and may represent an example of a kind of heteroflexibility (Mulholland 2015: 741). However, this potential for liberation is, Mulholland (2015: 741) argues, suspect to heteronormative conventions. And while the young people in Mulholland's (2015: 742) study granted porn a normative status in public life, such a status was constrained by conventions around, for example, respectability. It is this which, for Mulholland (2015: 742), highlights the contradictory nature of young people's narratives.

The young people, for example, employed notions of respectability in making clear judgements about what is and is not acceptable (Mulholland, 2015: 742). Further to this, Mulholland's (2015: 744) research found that girls were often the signifiers of 'hot' or 'slutty'. Boys, meanwhile, were never mentioned in discussions about what marked out the 'slutty' from the 'hot' or respectable (Mulholland, 2015: 744). The differences between the terms 'slut' and 'hot' were articulated as follows: the former signified fake and too much, while the latter was associated with being good looking and respectful (Mulholland, 2015: 744). The students were therefore at pains to stress that what matters are not explicit sexualised expressions but more so behaviour (Mulholland, 2015: 743). For Mulholland (2015: 744), the bordering of

respectable from the slutty was a clear indication of how public porno-heterosex continued to function as non-normative and perverse if such instances 'go too far'. The notion of 'going too far' employs a historically familiar classed and gendered indicator, which, shapes the heteronormative (Mulholland, 2015: 744; see also, Skeggs, 1997). Mulholland (2015: 744) explains that this represents a continuation of historically familiar markers of civilised, restrained sexuality, set against the unrestrained, licentious, sexuality of classed others.

Mulholland (2015: 744) therefore theorises that girls are forced to walk a line which can easily mark them as 'slutty' and this works to continue gendered heteronormative logics whereby femininity and respectability are intimately (and dangerously) connected. It is for this reason that while porn may be routine and familiar for young people, heteronormal conventions simultaneously regulate what is permissible and acceptable (Mulholland, 2015: 744). With respect to the research as part of this thesis, it might be possible to suggest that walking this line continues from girlhood to womanhood. I say this as similar notions of appropriate femininity and respectable behaviour were experienced by the young women in this research, and this is particularly true when we consider the harsh judgements they face, and young men evade, for having casual sex.

The ways in which the young people articulate their relationship to porn in Mulholland's (2015: 745) study goes some way to challenging heteronormal histories that construct 'good' sex as restrained, civilised and controlled. In expressing an interest in pornified heterosex, students in Mulholland's (2015: 745) study offer the potential to disentangle good sex from a heteronomal history, especially for girls. However, Mulholland (2015: 731) theorises that in making this claim, she (and the students themselves) walk a careful line. The extent to which heterosexual porn can therefore be a matter of fun experimentation is simultaneously moderated by historically persistent signifiers of classed and gendered respectability (Mulholland, 2015: 731). And it is precisely this which can be seen as another form of heteronormative border work: the power of the heteronorm continues to regulate what is allowed (Mulholland, 2015: 745). Therefore, in regard to rethinking heterosexual practice and expression, Mulholland (2015: 745) concludes that the ways in which young people normalise porn both opens up and closes down transgressive possibilities.

3.3.8 Unwanted Sex on Campus

The final, most contemporary study of all reviewed in this chapter, is one which considers the interactional details of unwanted sexual encounters in the U.S. college campus environment. In the article 'Unwanted Sex on Campus: The Overlooked Role of Interactional Pressures and Gendered Sexual Scripts', Jessie Ford (2020: 31) explores how unwanted sex is produced in situ during sexual encounters. Bridging interactionist theory (drawing on the work of Goffman, Garfinkel and Blumer) with gendered sexual scripts (mooted in Gagnon and Simon's conceptualisation of the term), Ford (2020: 31) attempts to better understand how these two frameworks mediate the way young people make sense of sexual interactions. Ford's (2020: 31) research examines interview data collected from 110 heterosexual and queer college students' (58 women and 52 men) accounts of unwanted sex at a private university in the northeast of the United States. Ford (2020: 48) reports that, during sexual interactions, the students interviewed as part of her research frequently revealed doing reflexive work during sex to gauge the sexual situation, to weigh options, and to ultimately take action. This leads Ford (2020: 31) to theorise that young people do not just go along with a sexual encounter as it unfolds, rather that they routinely feel a need to make sense of the progression of the encounter. Ford (2020: 31) rightly points out that in the existing literature on unwanted sex, violence and incapacitation are the predominant ways that scholars presume it happens. And while there were indeed instances of force, threat of force, and incapacitation in her data, Ford suggests that more common, were the pressures from gendered sexual scripts and generic interactional smoothing that emerged in these unwanted encounters. It is precisely this new insight into how unwanted sex unfolds, and what Ford (2020: 34) posits to be the "examination of people's commitment to keep the sexual situation going smoothly", which is of interest and relevance to this thesis.

Similarly to the women in this research, many women, across Ford's interviews (2020: 38) reported not knowing whether a man might 'snap' (e.g., become angry and aggressive) as a reason to go along with sex. One woman in Ford's (2020: 35) study, when explaining a sexual scenario which she felt uncertain about, expressed concern about her ability to end or escape the sexual encounter. As a consequence, this woman did, what Ford (2020: 35) calls, active sense-making to understand the situation (e.g., she noted the location of the door and her phone in relation to the man). As leaving the situation was not viable, this woman in Ford's (2020: 35) study described having fairly rough sex to avoid an even more violent escalation. This encounter is very much similar to those experienced by some of the women interviewed as part

of this thesis, wherein the potential for violence leads them to have unwanted sex (Ford, 2020: 38). It is this reality of the potential for sexual violence that women live with, and that some have experienced, which, for Ford (2020: 38), affects how women think about sexual encounters, even in instances where it is unclear whether there is a threat in the present encounter. Paradoxically then, for some women it was better to have unwanted sex than to risk getting forcibly raped (Ford, 2020: 38).

Bringing the interactional back here, Ford (2020: 38, 39) notes that it is not only sexual violence by men that is detrimental but also its *potential.* The hyperawareness of rape can intrude into the interaction, even when the man present is not acting violently and in this way, this possibility of violence is sometimes lurking, not just happening in sexual encounters (Ford, 2020: 40). Unwanted sex becomes a site where the interactional meets the structural realities, such as the reality that many men do physically force sex on women and institutions often do nothing to punish them for it (Ford, 2018: 3). Therefore, when the women in this thesis speak to the possibility of 'men doing something awful' during sexual encounters and the inability to refuse sex so as not to 'make things awkward', they speak to Ford's (2020: 40) use of interactional and sexual scripting theories – the combination of the lurking, pernicious prospect of violence alongside a need for, and situational commitment to, social smoothness, which leaves women constrained as a consequence.

Ford (2020: 50) suggests that given that this potential for violence may be present in young women's heterosexual lives, an affirmative consent strategy might be helpful in situations where women are unsure as to whether they are in danger. In such situations, Ford (2020: 50) proposes that an overt discussion of consent, and greater communication in general, might help reinforce and reaffirm one's ability to stop or slow an encounter. She goes on to note that campus-wide discussions could also be of help to make it clear that this potential for violence can be in the air and that men need to offer reassurance that they will respect a no (Ford, 2020: 50). I would like to pause to note that while I agree with the latter statement, in my view the offer of affirmative consent, "yes means yes" strategies, are of little help here. Affirmative consent strategies have long been criticised for their simplistic approach (see for example Halley, 2016; Fischel, 2019; Seriser, 2019). But, more importantly, if women feel they are not able to refuse sex with a clear 'no', how will it be possible for them to always give an enthusiastic 'yes' to sex? This point, in my view, becomes particularly relevant when we consider the gendered binds

and pressures (e.g., the sexual double standard that judges women more harshly than men for having casual sex) that women report grappling with in heterosexual relations.

In the section titled interactional pressures and gendered sexual scripts, Ford (2020: 40) addresses how important gendered interactional expectations lead women, as well as men, towards unwanted sex that isn't always accompanied by woman interpreting their experiences through a narrative related to sexual violence. This secondary theme encompasses the possibility of how sexual encounters impact one's or another's reputation or identity (Ford, 2020: 40). Ford (2020: 40) finds, for example, that once a man or woman interprets the encounter through this lens, it becomes more likely that they will move to have sex to avoid reputational damage. Women describe interactions where they are aware that they want to avoid being seen as either a whore, easy, bitchy or leading a man on (Ford, 2020: 40). Women who report doing this in Ford's (2020: 40) research therefore take these possibilities into account in the moment and these conflicting pressures leave women in a situation where having sex or rejecting it can both result in a negative label. In several instances, women in Ford's (2020: 41) work described feeling responsible for finishing what they 'started.' The women describe a gendered expectation for them to follow through with sex, even though they did not actually want it (Ford, 2020: 41). This was particularly the case once women had done something that men might take as a signal for willingness to have sex (e.g., gotten in a taxi with him, touched him erotically) (Ford, 2020: 41). Heterosexual men in Ford's (2020: 43; see also, Meenagh, 2021; Ford, 2018) study meanwhile, described having unwanted sex to take advantage of a sexual opportunity, as turning sex down could, for men, result in ridicule. Thus there were gendered reputational consequences when navigating sexual encounters for both women and men in Ford's research (2020: 43). In this thesis, women also speak to these gendered interactional expectations, they disclose an inability to refuse sex in fear of "looking like a bitch," are concerned with rumour-spreading as a consequence of turning down men's sexual advances and share a fear of reputational consequences as a result of "not putting out" (e.g., having sex). If then, because of a sexist, double standard, where women are considered "easy" for spending time alone with men, women might feel acute pressure to have unwanted sex because they have already been labelled (Ford, 2020: 49; Armstrong et al, 2006). In other words, as Ford (2020: 50) rightly outlines, because women feared they had already been labelled as "easy," it was better to go through with sex so as not to be doubly labelled as "bitchy."

In sum, students' accounts of unwanted sex in Ford's (2020: 51) research demonstrate that - in the context of sex on campus - the gendered content of sexual scripts works both separately and jointly with generic interactional pressures to pull students toward unwanted sex. I agree with Ford's (2020: 51) statement that it is time for a multi-pronged strategy focused on developing a new erotic culture on campus. Ford (2020: 51) suggests using empowerment training to encourage a processes of self-reflection about the scripts that constrain sexual encounters which might help students deconstruct these scripts and to develop new strategies for confronting their adverse effects from the ground up.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has set out to discuss seven major works which have influenced the development of this thesis and cover some of the same similar themes seen in the findings chapters. From a review of the literature, the main questions become ones which consider why women's claims to empowerment can not be respected for what they are and why researchers in this space seem top-down in their interpretation of women's (albeit limited) moments of power as fragile and dangerous. This relates back to one of the central questions that this poses; as to whether heterosexual women can exercise some sense of agency and empowerment in their sexual encounters. Research in this space, with the exception of, for example Allen, Farvid's, Mulholland's and Ford's respective studies, tend to avoid framing women's heterosexuality as nuanced. In my view this limitation of the literature is one which this thesis intends to avoid, by providing an in depth look at the ways heterosexual lives can be complex and not, as Gavey (1998) puts it, all doom-and-gloom.

This thesis thus considers the ways in which we can construct a middle ground between women as empowered and women as victims, without forgetting about the power wielded by wider societal and cultural structures on women's choices (see here also, Beasley et al, 2012). Additionally, this thesis builds on the existing sociological literature of emotional labour in an attempt to analyse the self-work which women undertake in their heterosexual lives. I conclude that the young women interviewed as part of this research practice a unique combination of emotion, safety and sex work to cope with unpleasant situations, preserve their safety and observe the 'rules' of how heterosex ought to be experienced. Bringing together these two theoretical camps – which are often used separately from one and other - to analyse new empirical findings offers an original insight into women's heterosexual lives.

The subsequent chapter explores the methods and methodology employed for this thesis, focusing on the epistemological foundation, the research design, the methods used to analyse the data, a summary of the theoretical frameworks relating to the methodology used, the ethical considerations and concluding with the potential limitations of the study.

Chapter Four – Methods

4.1 Introduction: Feminist Epistemology

As outlined in the introductory chapter, the focus of this research has moved considerably, from fraternity brothers' conceptualisations of sexual consent to one which explores young women's reflections of their heterosexual lives. Feminism - and a focus on gendered power and heterosexuality, as covered in the prior literature review - have however, been a core influence in the development of this project. From the thinking behind it to the design, and ultimately its execution, a feminist epistemology heavily informs the literature that underpins this thesis, as well as the methodological theory and practice, and the analyses offered in this research, I will consider this epistemological position to begin this methodological chapter. Before beginning however, it is crucial to make clear that, for the purpose of ensuring anonymity, all identifying features of the individuals involved in this research have been removed from interview transcripts and to ensure participants cannot be identified from these extracts, pseudonyms have been used throughout, nor have any sorority or on-campus organisation, that the women were part of, been identified.

Feminist scholarship is diverse and there is no one feminist research style or mode of analysis (Hewer, 2016; Oakley, 1998; Stanley and Wise, 1983). What must be borne in mind then is, as Sparrow (2020) notes, that feminism is not, and never has been, only one thing; how can it be when women's lives - their identities, challenges and desires - are multiple, and influenced by numerous different circumstances.

Kelly, Burton and Regan (1994: 46; see also Ritchie and Barker, 2005) argue that what makes research 'feminist' is not the methods as such, but the theoretical framework within which research is located, and the particular ways in which they are deployed by the researcher. Although there is a lack of consensus amongst feminist researchers about what exactly constitutes 'feminist methodology', there is a common insistence that gender and power, and particularly the interplay of the two, are central to a feminist research endeavour (Harding 1987 in Burman, Batchelor and Brown, 2001: 446). Moreover, feminists have turned attention to the fluctuating and fluid nature of power within the research process itself, and the need to attend to gender and power relations between researchers and research participants (Burman,

Batchelor and Brown, 2001: 446). The aim of feminist epistemology then is to consider the role of the researcher in knowledge production, with a fundamental focus on listening to what people have to say about their lives and identifying patterns and relationships which expose the operations of power (Scott, 1998: 5 in McQueen, 2016: 68).

As it has been noted in the introduction, I characterize my work as feminist on the basis of my epistemological positioning and the methodological decisions made in advance of commencing the study. I assume, as Ramazanoglu has (1989: 435; see also, Burman, Batchelor and Brown, 2001: 446), that a key facet of feminist research is to produce knowledge that provides "understanding of women's experience as they understand it, interpretation of their experience in the light of feminist conceptions of gendered relationships, and a critical understanding of the research process." In line with this thinking is the importance of *rapport* in feminist research which can help to temporarily reduce imbalance in the researcher/researched relationship (Oakley, 2016; Duncombe and Jessop, 2002; McQueen, 2016). I have taken inspiration from Oakley (1981: 35; see also, Duncombe and Jessop, 2002: 109) in this thesis, as I consider myself, as a feminist researcher, and the women participating in my research, to be 'insiders' in the same culture, where the 'minimal' social distance between us offers the basis for an emotionally empathetic and reciprocal rapport. It is for this reason that, just as is the case in McQueen's (2016: 97) research, all of the women who offered their time in order to take part in this research are considered to be participants as opposed to *subjects.* After all, they form the foundation of this research (one might argue they *are* the research!) and of my trying to understand the inner workings of women's heterosexual lives. Thus, my feminist practice lies in investigating the underlying structures that underpin women's heterosexual lives, and locating these dynamics of male power, traditional heterosexual discourses and emotion work, but also by situating myself within the same broader community of heterosexual women in which the women in this thesis belong.

This chapter will begin by continuing to consider the major influences that have helped shape this thesis, thinking about feminism's capacity to bring about change via research and the influence of feminist standpoint theory in relation to this study. I go on to discuss my approach to the research design, and methods of data collection, which are followed by a reflection on the ethical responsibility of this research. The chapter then explores my approach to data analysis, looking specifically at the importance of stories, and the role of narrative and discourse analysis as well as the relevance of the theory of consciousness raising. The penultimate section

covers the theoretical framework pertaining to this study and the chapter concludes with a reflection on the limitations of this thesis.

4.1.1 Feminist Research and Creating Change

A way in which feminist research practice might be said to be distinctive from other practices has been because of its political nature and the potential it offers to bring about change in women's lives. At one time this was summed up in the slogan that feminist research was 'on', 'by' and 'for' women and that it should be designed with the aim of producing knowledge which would transform patriarchy (Maynard and Purvis, 1994: 431). Anne Opie (1992) has argued that there are at least three ways in which an individual may be personally empowered through participation in a research project. These are thought to be through their contribution to making visible a social issue, the therapeutic effect of being able to reflect on and re-evaluate their experience as part of the process of being interviewed, and the generally subversive outcome that these first two consequences may generate (Maynard and Purvis, 1994: 450; Opie, 1992). With this considered, and as is the case for Kelly, Burton and Regan (1994: 773) in their research, my position as feminist researcher is one in which I am part of the process of discovery and understanding. Taking inspiration from Ritchie and Barker (2005) here, I see my research as part of a broader agenda to encourage some kind of social change, although I am aware that this may well be beyond the scope of a doctoral study with a relatively small sample of participants. This particular view draws on the method of consciousness-raising (CR), to use women's lived experiences as a starting point from which to build and create useful knowledge, which can be used by ourselves and others to "make a difference" (Kelly, Burton and Regan, 1994: 760).

Skeggs (1994: 2041) crucially points out that feminist researchers ought to be mindful in their efforts to reveal gendered and sexist inequalities in women's lives and that this does not lead to condescension. For example, why should we assume that the women whom we research desire or are in need of an emancipation of sorts? To be condescending in this way may cause, as Skeggs (1994: 2041) rightly notes, to stop us listening to the women in our work, which is detrimental to our feminist endeavours. This has been borne in mind throughout the research process as I attempt to shed light on young women's experiences of heterosexuality.

My aim in this thesis is, first and foremost, to shed light on women's heterosexual lives. Keeping in mind the rate of sexual assault on campus I shed light on how college-aged women negotiate

and navigate their heterosexual experiences with men. From this overarching aim, I pay attention to whether women feel their pleasures and desires are respected, appreciated and attended to in their heterosexual lives, investigating whether they feel agency to explore their sexuality on their own terms. I examine how young heterosexual women cope with unpleasant sexual situations and finally I analyse which theoretical and conceptual tools can prove useful to understand and develop young women's stories of heterosexuality. I have endeavoured to remember that forms of sexual expression can, in a multitude of ways, be viewed as positive experimentation in the service of future desire, subjectivity, and pleasure. This is particularly important, not only because past research has overwhelmingly noted that the heterosexual world seems to be acutely dominated by the rights and needs of heterosexual men (Holland et al, 1998; Phillips, 2000; Powell, 2010; Ritchie and Barker, 2005), but also because there is a considerable amount of literature which raises concerns as to what constitutes women's true examples of sexual power.

4.1.2 Feminist Standpoint Theory

Sandra Harding's conceptualisation of standpoint theory has influenced the way I have approached this research, hence my moving to it at this point in the chapter. Harding rightly notes that women lead lives that have significantly different contours and patterns to those of men, and their subjugated position provides the possibility of more complete understandings and knowledges (Maynard and Purvis, 1994: 488, 489). This is particularly true when we consider women's reflections of heterosexuality, their empowerment, pleasures/desires, harm and fear in heterosex. Are all of these things considered, reflected upon and treated in the same way for both men and women in heterosex? Or are they likely to have different contours, different patterns for women – as Harding suggests? It is precisely this difference, this specific perspective or standpoint, which I am interested in illuminating.

Stanley and Wise (2006: 18) note that Harding affirmed standpoint theory as an epistemological position concerned with knowledge from the standpoint of women. Sociological knowledge produced from a feminist standpoint should discover the social life and relationships of women, but it would also be knowledge *for* women (Ramazanoglu, 1989: 428). Hartsock saw a feminist standpoint as rooted in women's essential material life, in that it is the material oppression experienced in women's daily lives which gives them a different standpoint from that of men (Ramazanoglu, 1989: 433). As Ramazanoglu (1989: 433) indicates, a feminist standpoint, therefore, subverts male power and is a view that must be struggled for.

Yet, we ought to reflect upon feminist standpoint theory critically for a moment. For example, our own personal experiences and identities, our own *locations*, constitute active barriers to understanding other women's unacknowledged power relations (Ramazanoglu, 1989: 435). I agree with McRobbie (1982: 52) when she notes that it is vital that women speak back to us, we researchers who are sometimes over-comfortably placed in a cosy feminist culture, about their discontents. As made evident in the second chapter of this thesis, while gender is considered a construct, this does not make it independent of other (constructed) identity factors. As Elizabeth Spelman (1990; see also, Mikkola, 2006, 2008) notes, womanness is inseparable from other aspects of one's identity such as, race and class and thus individual women do not share a universal womanness. We cannot and should not claim then, that the standpoint of one woman represents the standpoint of *all women*. Being a woman is, without question, conditioned differently according to different societies, cultures and geographies - women are not simply women, but are particular *kinds* of women (Spelman, 1990: 115 in Mikkola, 2006: 82; Stoljar, 1995; Mikkola, 2008).

We, as researchers and feminists, must always be mindful of how, as Kimberlé Crenshaw (2009; see, Guidroz and Berger 2009: 65). writes, systems of oppression overlap. Crenshaw (2009) makes clear in her interview with Guidroz and Berger (2009: 65) that in disregarding the fact that these systems overlap and intersect, and *how* they do so – e.g. by claiming that one woman can speak for all women simply because of her gender identity – we risk abandoning "issues, causes and people who are actually affected by these overlapping systems of domination." However, as Crenshaw (2009: 70) herself posits, it is crucial not to read her intersectional analysis "multiplying identity categories" as opposed to constituting a structural analysis or political critique. This, Crenshaw (2009: 70) suggests, is troubling as it leads to listing people with descriptions and no analysis as to how their particular conditions are located within structures of power. When doing feminist work then, we must always consider and reflect upon how women's conditions are located within wider structures of racialised, ableist, sexist and capitalist power, within societies, communities and cultures.

However, if feminism's presumed goal is assumed to ensure equality, it does not always reach this objective. We need not look far to find an example of feminisms' failings in this regard. Take, for instance, the number of trans-exclusionary radical feminists in Britain, individuals who self-identify as feminists but push a conservative, essentialist and anti-trans agenda. These

women (and men), and their views, have caused me to struggle with the feminism label. How can I call myself a feminist (and by extension engage in feminist research) when, as a group, feminism includes such a broad category of individuals, some of whose views are hateful and harmful to women we should respect, support and take inspiration from? Trans and non-binary people are not a threat to feminism and womanhood. Rather, by challenging the gender binary, trans and non-binary individuals can "show us the way", as Angela Davis thoughtfully considers in relation to abolitionist politics (stemming from the organised effort to abolish slavery in the United States. and often used in more recent times in calls to abolish police departments in the U.S):

> We support the trans community precisely because this community has taught us how to challenge that which is totally accepted as normal. And I don't think we would be where we are today - encouraging ever larger numbers of people to think within an abolitionist frame - had not the trans community taught us that it is possible to effectively challenge that which is considered the very foundation of our sense of normalcy. So, if it is possible to challenge the gender binary, then we can certainly, effectively, resist prisons, and jails, and police (Davis, 2020).

The key point here is that feminism cannot bind all women together purely on the grounds of gender (McRobbie, 1982: 52, 53). To make such a claim is to overload the potential of the women's movement and to underestimate the resources and capacities of women and girls who occupy different cultural and political spaces (McRobbie, 1982: 52, 53). Perhaps instead a continuing struggle with these issues ought to be an integral part of feminist standpoint research process (Merrick, 1999: 53) – or, at the very least, my own feminist research.

4.2 Research Design

I conducted my fieldwork at a large public research institution in a southern U.S. state from August 2018 until March 2019. This involved me undertaking a Visiting Scholar position at the University and applying for a J-1 visa in order to support this. This process was relatively painless and took around 4 months in total. The University itself was set within a large and consistently growing city in the South and the student population stood at around 40,000 while I was there. Fraternity and sorority life were active on campus – a point which was reiterated to me several times by the individuals involved in my focus groups. This was an important

factor in me choosing my location for fieldwork, as I have explored in the introductory chapter of this thesis, my initial focus was to conduct research with fraternity brothers, exploring their views of sexual consent. There were over 60 different fraternity and sorority groups (formally referred to as chapters) at the university, with over 1 in 10 of the undergraduate student body registered as part of a sorority or fraternity, making the Greek community (Greek community referring to the two to three Greek alphabet letters used to name the fraternity and sororities themselves, e.g., Phi Beta Kappa), at the university one of the largest in the United States. Many student-led and focused activities took place on campus, with sorority and fraternity houses located centrally to the campus itself. Much of the night time economy centred around fraternity houses, whereby parties would be hosted (sororities I was told, were traditionally not permitted to host parties and this was an activity assumed exclusively by the fraternities), though countless students would also descend to an area downtown of the city where there was a mass of bars and clubs often frequented.

4.2.1 Initial Focus

My initial intention was to explore the topics of sex, relationships and consent from the perspective of fraternity brothers in the U.S, which was the reason for me travelling to a large, American institution with a significant fraternity population. The overarching question of this thesis was whether sexual consent for men in fraternities was considered to exist in the same way in theory as it was in practice. Over a number of months, I attempted to put together a sample of male students who were members of fraternities - by door-knocking, distributing flyers, approaching individuals on campus and speaking at events - men involved in Greek fraternity life were strikingly reluctant to talk to me in a focus group setting. In one instance, I contacted an individual who held a high position on a board of sorts which involved him overseeing fraternity life and membership at the university - he was also a member of a fraternity himself. In an attempt to recruit participants for my work I explained my research to him via email and outlined my reason for visiting the U.S. Within a day I received a response, in which he plainly stated that sexual assault was a "hot topic at the moment" and for that reason he anticipated I would find it difficult, if not impossible, to speak to fraternity men without use of some sort of incentive.

This interaction was double-edged in that it was equally revealing and frustrating. Upon re-reading my initial communication to him, I realised I had not mentioned sexual assault, I had simply stated my focus was sexual consent and its deeper meaning. His immediate association

between sexual consent and sexual assault was telling to me, despite my not mentioning the latter. After he had come to a conclusion about my research focus, his subsequent reaction was self – or group in this case – preservation. He informed me that sexual assault was a popular area of discussion, using the specific phrase "hot topic" to describe it, which seemed a particularly loaded word choice. Not only did he mean it was a topic that was under intense scrutiny (admittedly it was, this happened in November 2018 and the #MeToo movement was close to its one-year anniversary), but his choice of words also spoke to a potential personal risk associated with a discussion of sexual assault. This reaction suggested to me that such a conversation around sexual consent with fraternity men was unlikely to happen due to them possibly incriminating themselves in the process. The only circumstance in which such a discussion was to happen were if they were to gain from it financially, which perhaps speaks to the huge monetary investment and greed that surrounds fraternities.

This kind of interaction occurred multiple times in various iterations over the course of months. In another instance, at a student-led sexual assault prevention meeting held by an anti-rape organisation on campus, I happened to be introduced to a faculty member responsible for fraternity and sorority life at the University. In fact, I had previously sent her multiple emails in recruitment attempts, all of which went unanswered. She acknowledged my attempts at making contact but informed me that she decided against replying as she had some trepidation as to what the protocol was behind fraternity men talking to me, an outside researcher unaffiliated with Greek life. Her concern here was unfounded, as I had ethical clearance from the University I was researching at, which allowed me to speak to fraternity men. She somewhat ironically assured me that fraternities on campus were doing plenty of work in the area of sexual misconduct training and prevention – gesturing to the meeting turn out as she presented to me how many young men from fraternities were at the meeting, after all. I took her response to be another example of fraternal preservation, and fear of implication.

Finally, in December 2018 I was able to talk to two groups of fraternity men (one group of four and another group of three) and upon realising that I was coming into difficulty in recruiting more men - this realisation came 4 months into a 7-month fieldwork period - I made the decision to approach my research from the perspective of women who I thought would be more forthcoming in sharing their experiences. I decided to approach women at numerous sorority chapter meetings, where I would introduce myself and my research in an effort to spark recruitment. Eventually, my sample snowballed from sorority women to women on campus

who were not affiliated with Greek life - women had heard of my work and contacted me, wanting to be involved. I managed to conduct 5 focus groups with women, 2 sessions of which were follow up discussions with the same groups of women, and each session lasted between one and a halt to two hours. In total, I spoke to 17 women over the course of the focus group sessions.

As outlined, my initial intention was to approach the topic of sexual consent with men, exploring how they understood consent to work in theory, and how it manifested itself in their practical sex lives. I wondered if there was a tension of sorts between these two things, in that they may express support for affirmative models of sexual consent – these "yes means yes" approaches which are by and large becoming commonplace in being promoted at large universities – but in actual fact, they did not replicate this in their practical sex lives. It was this mismatch (which has been well documented in the literature, particularly around male student's practices for obtaining sexual consent, see Bedera's 2017 study of college-aged men's negotiations of sexual consent) that I wanted to explore; I wanted to understand why such a disparity existed, thinking critically about what this meant for the women they were having sex with. Most importantly however, I wanted to understand and reveal how fraternity men in particular reflected upon sexual consent, embedding this within a wider discussion of their cultures, attitudes and every-day practices. Focusing on consent from a fraternity brother's standpoint is something that is significantly lacking in the consent literature and I sought to fill this gap.

The difficulties I encountered in recruiting fraternity men ultimately meant I had to modify my theoretical focus as well as my research questions. Yet, even as I was approaching my topic from a fraternity standpoint, I was acutely aware that my main interest lay in understanding experiences of "consent to unwanted sex" and exploring why this phenomenon happens, particularly for women. Making the change in my sample did not prove particularly difficult in practical terms, rather quite the opposite and I saw this change as an opportunity to further refine my research focus. I embarked upon fieldwork with a keen interest in reflexivity and I knew I wanted to commit to be reflexive throughout the process. Certainly, coming into recruitment difficulties became increasingly frustrating. It felt overwhelming to be on my own in a new environment only to realise that my research ideas were not going to come to fruition. Nevertheless, reflexivity allowed me to be self-critical, to be introspective and acknowledge that my approach to fieldwork was raising some issues and thus needed to be altered. As daunting

as this may have been, it led me to new insights and offered me a way to be flexible in my approach.

4.2.2 The Shift to the Current Focus

My research was transformed at this point as I decided that I would shift my focus from fraternity men to sorority women, anchoring my research project more broadly in the lived experiences that young, heterosexual women have with young men. And so, this thesis developed to be one which shed light on young women's reflections of their heterosexual lives. With this in mind, my research questions were oriented towards the following:

- How women positioned themselves within heterosex and how they reflected upon ideas of sexual pleasure and desire?
- Whether and to what extent, women felt able to exercise a sense of agency and/or sexual empowerment within their heterosexual lives?
- In what ways did young women cope with unpleasant sexual situations?
- What tools, both theoretical and conceptual, can be useful to build upon to understand the young women's stories?

As mentioned, these questions developed organically over time as I embarked on the data collection stage of the research and evolved as the focus group discussions did. Most importantly, the questions spoke to the main themes and concepts that the women discussed during the focus groups. What I mean by this is that through the sessions, a discussion opened up around pleasure, desires, the contradictions associated with the two, as well as inequalities, dangers, risks and concerns of heterosex. Women shared their experiences of sexual empowerment, disclosing stories of finding joy and pleasure in making sexual choices and discovering sexual desires. At the same time, women also revealed episodes of non-consensual condom removal during sex - often referred to as "stealthing" (Brodsky, 2017) – and disclosed ways in which their sexual partners failed to take the topic of sexual health seriously. They explained how heterosexual encounters were often shaped by and for men, with male pleasure taking priority. At the same time though, they shared stories of attentive sexual partners and fulfilling sexual encounters. Some women involved in this project explained ways in which they would mitigate risks during sexual situations, managing their own and men's emotions in fear of danger. From all of these issues that the women raised, I was able to tailor my questions to

offer the women a chance to discuss matters of importance to them. And consequently, I am able to present here, a multifaceted picture of these young women's heterosexual lives, their beliefs, their practices, understandings and risks.

4.2.3 Some Concerns: Textual Appropriation

As I have reflected upon these stories that were shared, I have become concerned about the consequences that fieldwork of this kind can create. Here I am thinking about appropriation of a textual nature. As researchers we are perhaps in a contradictory position, in that the things that fieldwork, interview or focus groups participants share with a researcher – the emotional stories, tragedies, pain and joy – are in essence, data (England, 1994: 86). The moments described above prompted inner conflict for me; I was listening sympathetically to women telling me about the intimate details of their lives and experiences while also thinking how their words would translate into interesting data points for the purpose of this thesis, and how their stories could be analysed more deeply to illuminate various sexist and gender stereotypes (England, 1994: 86). McRobbie (1982: 55) summarised this feeling best when she noted that indeed at times during the fieldwork process it feels like we researchers are "holidaying on other people's misery." Opie (1992: 64) suggests, and I am in agreement here, that this appropriation can be partially avoided by the use of qualitative research methods which can lead to an empowerment of participants on a personal and broadly therapeutic level. Arguably, by taking part in my research, the women involved have lifted the veil of invisibility surrounding their sexual experiences, thus opening up a, usually, obscured experience to a more public gaze (Opie, 1992: 65). As I have outlined, many women were able to reflect on and re-evaluate their experiences as part of the process of being involved in my focus groups. For some, as I will explore in a subsequent section of this chapter, this re-evaluation had important personal consequences and awakenings of sorts (Opie, 1992: 65) - so much so that many women involved in my work expressed enjoyment in taking part, noting that the discussions were interesting and remedial, and that some experiences, for the young women, were considered and reflected upon in ways that they had not been before.

Although these are positive outcomes, it is important to recognise here that the research relationship is inherently hierarchical and there are indeed power dynamics at play between researcher and researched. Perhaps this inner conflict and concern with textual appropriation is simply part of role of the researcher, but this does not mean we cannot try to counterbalance it (England, 1994). In fact, taking inspiration from England (1994: 86) here, I pursued my

research project in the full knowledge that I cannot speak *for* the women involved in my work. Like England (1994: 87) I consider what I have been studying to be a world that is already interpreted by women who are living their lives inside it. As a result of this, my research is an account of the "betweenness" of their world and mine (England, 1994: 87). Taking this approach, as well as always asking ourselves, as researchers, who we are writing for and what kinds of authorities should we be claiming (England, 1994: 87), while honouring stories and experiences creates an awareness of textual appropriation.

4.3 Methods of Data Collection: Focus Groups

As alluded to above, this research project adopted one main method of data collection which was focus groups. My decision to use this method lies predominantly in the type of discussion I wanted to have; I thought that interviews would have been too intimate for some women and may have run the risk of making them feel uncomfortable in a one-on-one setting. My assumption was that women would feel more at ease in a focus group environment as they would be surrounded by their peers and friends, thus making them feel confident in disclosing their thoughts and experiences, which they likely would have already shared with such a group. When considering my method of choice here, I was also drawn to focus groups due to its potential to offer research participants a chance to realise group commonalities in what may previously have seemed like personal issues (Wilkinson, 1999). In fact, Firth (2000) considers focus groups – particularly conducted around the research areas of sex and sexualities – as a method that is able to enhance the disclosure of sex-related material, namely by promoting an awareness of shared experiences which in turn encourages discussion of sensitive issues.

4.3.1 Focus Groups: The Practical Details

I approached the recruitment of participants for my research by speaking to sororities directly via email. This strategy proved successful as I was frequently invited to chapter meetings (i.e., weekly meetings of all sorority members hosted at the sorority house). During these chapter meetings I would briefly introduce myself and my research. Once the meetings had culminated, I would spend sometime in the sorority house to allow for women to talk to me and provide their details if they were interested in taking part. The chapter meetings were, in some ways, an invaluable part of the research process. Being granted access to the majority of the women in the sorority group was not only beneficial for recruitment purposes, but being inside the sorority house itself allowed for a better understanding of sorority culture. I got a sense of, albeit

for an hour at most, the grandiosity of the sorority house, on occasion I was greeted by the house Mother, I was astounded on one occasion to watch as an in-house-chef prepared the women's evening meal. In another instance, I arrived at a meeting wearing an outfit which was all black and unbeknownst to me, the young women were also head-to-toe in black so as to adhere to the meeting dress code. That moment felt somewhat anthropological – I was an outside researcher unintentionally camouflaged, observing the group. I overheard the women's conversations (considered by some as mundane) and was able to get an insight into their lifestyles and what was important to them; what it was they were excited to watch on TV that evening, how inundated they were in college work, what their weekend plans were, how their evenings prior had unravelled. The chapter meeting exposed the inner workings of these exclusive groups and gave them cultural, social meaning.

Of the 17 women interviewed, many were in their freshman year of college (7 in total), while 5 of the women were juniors, 3 were in their senior year and 2 were sophomores. The majority of the women identified as white (13 in total), while 3 identified as Hispanic and 1 woman identified as South Asian. All of the women taking part in the focus groups identified as heterosexual, 10 of them were single at the time of our conversation and 7 were in a relationship. A sample size as small and as homogenous as the one used in this thesis produces some limitations, namely that the data collected cannot be generalised and applied to all women. It is, however, somewhat revealing that despite being a fairly privileged group of young women, those included in this research still struggle considerably with aspects of their heterosexual lives (e.g., exploring their sexual agency free from judgement). So, if this group of women, who sit at the intersection of advantage (thinking about the multiple privileges bestowed to them on the grounds of whiteness, middle classness and female gender), still experience the binds of heterosexuality, how might a more diverse cohort of heterosexual women reflect upon their experiences? Would their experiences of heterosexuality have even more complex layers and contours of inequality as overlapping and intersecting? It ought to be underscored that women's experiences are not monolithic and nor are they independent of facets of identity. The patterns and themes arising as from the data collection reflects the experience very specific category of privileged women, the majority of whom identify as white, are predominantly middle class and heterosexual. This thesis is therefore not, in any way, indicative of young women's experiences of sexual relationships in a broad sense. Including women from diverse classed and raced backgrounds would allow for a consideration of young

women's experiences more widely and it is precisely this which I will be committed to in any future research.

The focus group sessions lasted between an hour and fifteen minutes to two hours in duration, all were recorded digitally. Some rough fieldnotes pertaining to the themes arising from the conversations were taken during the sessions. Similar themes cut across all 5 of the focus groups as the women often spoke of the same topics and phenomena (e.g., the sexual double standard, the difficulties associated with advocating for condom use during sex and the contemporary sexual harms they encountered, such as non-consensual condom removal). The focus groups were conducted on campus, in a classroom which was part of a building where my office was located. The sessions usually took place in the evening at a time where there were fewer students on campus so as to limit any distractions. The exception to this was focus group number 3, which was conducted in the afternoon due to time constraints of the group. All of the women were assured that our discussions were wholly confidential, that I would not be sharing any of the details of our conversations with others and that they would not be identified at the writing up stage of the research.

Close friendship ties and membership to the same sororities and organisations on campus indisputably created a level of familiarity, intimacy and ease amongst the women. It is these established ties which enabled the candid, and often painful, conversations to take place in the focus group sessions. It is my view that because the women were aware that they shared similar experiences, and potentially beliefs and attitudes, this made them more courageous in expressing fears, ignorances and tragedies (Firth, 2000: 283). The first focus group, for example, consisted of women who were all close friends - they were all members of the same extra-curricular group on campus. Some of the women (2) were members of a sorority (although not the same sorority), while some (2) were affiliated with a so-called spirit group (e.g., a service organisation which has the main aim of serving the community and promoting 'spirit' among university students), the rest of the women (3) were not members of a sorority or spirit group. In the second focus group, all of the 5 women were close friends and members of the same sorority. Again, in the third group, all of the women were members of the same sorority, however only 2 of them were close friends, this dynamic might go some way in explaining why this particular group were the most reserved when we first began our discussions. The fourth and fifth focus group sessions were conducted as follow up sessions. As part of these sessions I would attempt to tease out some of the themes that the women spoke of in our prior discussions.

Focus group number 4 was a follow-up with the same women in focus group 1, albeit with the addition of one woman who was a close friend of one member of the group. Focus group number 5 was a follow up with group 2 and involved the same women, with no additional participants.

At the beginning of each of the focus group sessions, I would introduce myself and my own research, explaining what it was that I was interested in and what my research background was. Given the sensitive subject matter, I made a small effort to make the setting comfortable by bringing food and snacks. I gave the women time to ask me questions before we began any formal discussion, many of them were curious about my background and why I chose to embark on fieldwork at the university. I asked them questions too, about themselves, what they were studying and about social life on campus. I attempted to make the women feel comfortable and this back and forth of questions at the beginning proved a way to build rapport and trust between us. I wanted to reassure them of the confidentiality of the discussions and reiterate that the conversations ventured into would be done so in a, for want of a better term, safe space. As I detail in the subsequent sections of this chapter, I found that the women were enthusiastic to talk about their heterosexual experiences and my position as an outside researcher proved little barrier to the candid conversations that follow.

4.3.2 Focus Groups: Why this Method?

Thinking about the disclosure of sensitive information for a moment here, on a number of occasions during the sessions the women shared, frankly and honestly, intimate details of their personal sexual lives. Perhaps the most memorable was during my first group discussion. I had begun approaching the topic of women's pleasure in heterosex and Sana explained how she was hooking up with a man who couldn't bring her to orgasm: "it was kind of brief, and although I wasn't finishing (coming to orgasm), I didn't say anything about it because I just wasn't comfortable enough'. After Sana explained this, Claire opened up to the group that she often fakes orgasms, declaring that she does it 'all the time'. Hannah was steadfast in her view that even though she regularly faked orgasm because men generally found it hard to make her orgasm, she wouldn't decline male attention and many of the group agreed with her statement. Nicole went on to unpack this further, she too shared that she had never experienced an orgasm but explained that that didn't mean she didn't like having sex with her partner. Laura agreed and reflecting on her own relationship with her boyfriend, declared that: 'it brings me pleasure

to bring him pleasure'. It seemed that with this proclamation Laura had accurately condensed her own as well as Hannah and Nicole's feelings as they both strongly agreed.

Clearly here, and as noted previously, the shared experiences, the established friendship/group membership ties, as well as the familiarity between the women made it easier for the women to be open about their personal accounts of pleasure and their enjoyment during sex despite not experiencing orgasm during the encounter. What is more though, is that the focus group arguably tapped into a previously unrecognised area of interest because the young women had the opportunity to steer discussions in directions of their own personal concern (Firth, 2000: 278). Despite the use of my prepared focus group schedule with questions and topics to cover, I often noticed that the lively and enthusiastic discussions often brought about unanticipated areas of interest (Firth, 2000: 278). The discussion around faking orgasm and bringing, or perhaps prioritising male pleasure above their own, is an example of this. Consequently then, focus groups were a useful way of inviting the women to introduce their own themes and concerns (Firth, 2000: 278).

It is my view here that knowledge and meaning are collective, as well as individual productions and with that, focus groups could offer me an effective method for getting at this socially produced knowledge (Montel, 1999). As Wilkinson (1998: 186) rightly suggests, research methods which isolate participants from their social context are inappropriate if researcher-interest lies in collective or group knowledge. Emphasis on the communal and connected selves - using focus groups to substantiate this (Wilkinson, 1998) - allows for a clearer understanding to develop with regards to the social and cultural processes through which women's understandings and experiences of sex, relationships and consent are constructed. In line with this, a focus group offers a context in which individuals may argue with one another and challenge each other's views (Bryman, 2012). This process rarely happens in one-to-one interviewing where the research participant is arguably dislocated from their social context and in conversation only with the researcher (Wilkinson, 1998: 187, 193).

Using focus groups then meant that as a researcher, I stood a chance of getting more realistic accounts of women's thoughts about sex, consent and relationships because in this forum their views may be challenged, questioned and thus reflected upon in a nuanced way. Further to this, as Montel (1999) outlines, focus groups give participants an opportunity to narrate their own personal experiences and to test their interpretations of events and processes with others.

Whether these experiences are confirmed or disputed, the result is a multiplicity of voices speaking from a variety of subject positions (Montel, 1999). As I wanted to delve deeper into women's experiences of heterosexuality, their desires and pleasures, the risks and anxieties they faced and understanding any moments of empowerment, creating an environment in my fieldwork whereby a collection of voices, experiences and stories could be fostered became incredibly important. I take inspiration from Cook and Fonow (1986: 12, 13), here in that I see the purpose of this focus-group produced knowledge to change or transform and intend to analyse it in such a way that it can be used by women to alter oppressive and exploitative conditions in society. This is a central aim of feminist epistemology, as explained earlier.

One of the other key benefits of using focus group discussions to investigate sex-related behaviour and attitudes is that they allow access to the language and vocabulary which participants commonly use (Firth, 2000: 278). I was increasingly aware – after reading much of the literature around the topic, speaking to women close to me and reflecting on my own experiences – that women likely would describe their experiences of heterosex and relationships in a multitude of different ways. Indeed, some women in my work disclosed experiences that would legally constitute rape or sexual assault but nevertheless avoided labelling them as such. Terri, a woman taking part in my focus groups, explained for instance, how before she began University, she was steadfast in her view that she intended to wait for marriage before having sex, and that this was a large part of her identity. This ultimately changed when she began a long-term relationship in college which then later broke down. Despite this, Terri reflected on her sex-before-marriage ideal as having evolved and in her own words, she now knew that 'it wasn't an abomination to want to have sex and seek pleasure from someone', though she stated that she knew she would be most comfortable being intimate with people who cared about her and whom she had a secure relationship with, rather than having more causal encounters with someone unfamiliar to her. After revealing her view to the group, Terri emotionally and hurriedly divulged how she blamed herself when, after blacking out at fraternity event, she awoke to find herself in a male friend's bed:

Terri: Actually one night, uhm it was uhm *[trails off, inaudible]* I blacked out and blacked back in and I was in some guy's bed and we were supposed to be friends and like uhhh… I texted? him a week later like 'did we actually have sex?' I just don't know because like I just like don't know what happened to me. I remembered like I started crying at the bar because he *[her male friend]* asked me about whatever happened with my boyfriend *[Her previous long-term boyfriend]*

and I started crying and he was like oh I will walk you home and that is all I remember. I don't know if I enticed him in some way… I mean, I guess. I woke back up in his room and just like left, so I didn't wanna become, I didn't… I told him you can't tell anyone that this happened because I don't want people to find out I slept with two guys in the fraternity

Terri begins to cry

Chiara: How did that transpire, that situation, if you don't mind speaking about it?

T: We are still friends, *[she sighs]* I go back and forth between like *[pauses]* was I raped or, taken advantage – wouldn't say rape – was it sexual assault or did I… Did I… Uhm… I dunno. I just like, don't think about it. Yeah.

Terri was clearly upset at this point and I could see that she was uncomfortable telling us anymore than she already had. After all, she proclaimed that she tends not to think about the experience, her revealing it to the group must have taken significant courage. When I transcribed this part of the audio recording, the way in which Terri discussed the experience was muddled – understandably so, it must have been bewildering for her – which made it difficult for me to decipher in parts. Despite this difficulty, this example demonstrates how crucial it is to this work, and others similar, of investigating women's vocabularies, giving them space to explain things with terms and colloquialisms they are comfortable with. Terri's story developed after I had probed whether the women in the group felt there was a sexual double standard between themselves and young men, my question came after a lengthy discussion of the shame and stigma associated with sleeping with a lot of people. If the conversation had taken a different turn and had I asked the group whether they had experienced rape or sexual assault, Terri may have been reluctant to share her story. After all, she refrained from characterising the experience as rape and admitted some confusion as to what to label it. Thus, using focus groups in this particular instance allowed Terri to disclose an intensely sensitive story in her own time, using meaningful language she was comfortable with. Certainly, there were ethical ramifications of Terri becoming so upset and relaying a distressing story – all of which are covered in a subsequent section of this chapter. However, in this particular case, Terri's story prompted me to pause the focus group, checking-in with her to be sure she was emotionally, psychologically, physically OK. I reiterated to the group that we did not have to continue as their wellbeing was paramount to any data collection endeavours of mine. And at this juncture, Terri confirmed that she was happy to continue involvement in the discussion and the focus group progressed.

4.3.3 Focus Groups: Style and Approach

As it may now be clear, I endorse Oakley's (1981; see also, Finch, 1984) position that, as a feminist and a sociologist, one should be creating a sociology for women - that is a sociology which articulates women's experiences of their lives - rather than merely creating data for oneself as researcher. My focus group schedule, which developed concurrently alongside the data collection process, was designed to cover the topics of women's sexual empowerment, women's pleasure and the pressures around sex that exist in heterosexual encounters. These were chosen as they were some of the central issues discussed in the literature regarding women's heterosexual lives. These were also signalled as the most important topics to the women involved in this research; sexual empowerment, pleasure, pressures and risks were all themes which were discussed by women across the focus groups. My questions came about then as a collaborative process, in that they were guided by the women themselves. These topics were then reconfigured in the form of the top-level research questions, asking whether women feel a sense of agency and empowerment in their heterosexual lives and deliberating how navigate unpleasant sexual situations.

As the focus groups progressed, I consequently had a series of topics which I wished to explore, alongside some very unstructured questions as a guide, but there was no set way in which they were to be covered (Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1994:136). My intention was to be very responsive to the concerns of the women, letting them talk their way into what was important for them (Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1994:136). As I have previously mentioned, I was seeking reciprocity in the research relationship with the women involved and it was crucial for me to be sensitive to any intrusion into women's lives. I was inspired by Holland and Ramazanoglu (1994: 135) when they suggest realising the meanings and lifeworld of the women being researched in a way that makes sense for the women themselves. The way in which Griffin (1986: 180; see also, Wilkinson, 1998: 115) reflects upon how she was guided by young women in her own research influenced me as well, so much that I found her framing extremely useful during my own data collection process. She notes that the informal, semi-structured nature of the group interviews in schools – in my case it was in a university setting - meant that young women sometimes began to discuss particular issues amongst themselves, without waiting for my next question. (Griffin, 1986: 180 in Wilkinson, 1998: 115). Griffin (1986: 180; see also, Wilkinson, 1998: 115) goes on to explain that these discussions did not always fall within her

list of pre-selected topics but that she was able to reflexively and responsively amend this list as the research progressed.

As I was beginning my fieldwork, I had devised my questions so that they were heavily focused on consent-obtaining practices (e.g., 'what words, signs and behaviours do you use to express consent?'). During my first focus group I posed this question to the women and found it would encourage more matter-of-fact answers: 'I say do you have a condom' or 'I will undress myself'. While these ways of obtaining consent are certainly interesting and worthy of deeper analysis, I realised that the question I had posed was not framed correctly and thus it did not get to the heart of what I wanted to highlight in my work – how women reflect on their heterosexual experiences with men. I continued to keep this question on my focus group agenda albeit it was not as prioritised as it had been previously. Instead, I found through my first focus group that questions which focused on sexual empowerment and agency ('how empowered do you feel to say no in sexual situations?' or 'how empowered do you feel to say what you want during sexual encounters?') encouraged more of a discussion about a wide range of sexual experiences (e.g. the sexual double standard, the prioritisation of men's pleasure). This came about simply by letting the women's responses and discussions amongst one another guide me to establish what questions would elicit the most meaningful answers. In sum then, my questions began to come about more organically, figuring out what phenomena(s) of heterosex were most important to the women, and consequently formatting my questions to guide the focus group discussions in a way which allowed the women to share what was of most significance to them.

Further to this, it is true that at the outset of the focus group I was faced with a problem that Brannen (1988: 553) outlines; of whether and how to name the topic under investigation. Because my topic is of a sensitive nature, I trod warily at the beginning of focus group so as not to, as Brannen (2988: 553) puts it, reveal all my hands at the outset. Thus in these more sensitive qualitative research projects, it is important not to prejudge the research problem by labelling it or defining its boundaries too closely; respondents may thereby define the problem in their own terms allowing the research topic to emerge gradually in its own terms is a theoretical as well as a methodological strategy: it has implications for the meaning and conceptualisation of the research question and not only for the techniques for collecting information (Brannen, 1988: 553).

Like Ezzy (2010: 163) I agree that interviews – and by extension focus groups too here - are emotional and embodied performances and that good interviewing is facilitated by a reflexive awareness of, and engagement with, the emotional, embodied, and performed dimensions of the interview. Most researchers in the area of sex and sexualities consider it essential to adopt a non- judgemental, non-evaluative approach to interviewing in order to ensure maximum disclosure from participants (Firth, 2000: 286). Interviewers are advised to maintain a neutral, professional manner and are reminded that an 'essential goal' in interviewing, especially on sensitive topics like sex, is to create a neutral, non-judgmental, and confiding atmosphere (Laumann et al., 1994: 62 and 67 in Firth, 2000: 286). Due to the sensitive nature of the topic being discussed in the focus groups, it was crucial for me to reflect upon the style with which I conducted the sessions. As I have alluded to, the focus group conversation contained highly personal questions about topics which would not normally be discussed with a stranger, or in many cases topics that had not been discussed with anyone previously (McQueen, 2016: 88). As Brannen (1988: 559) rightly notes, respondents involved in such work as mine are vulnerable to their emotions and telling one's story may bring a lot of distress to the fore and under these circumstances' researchers may feel a powerful urge to help.

Admittedly, many times during the focus group sessions I experienced this powerful urge to help that Brannen outlines. As Terri shared her story with the group, she contemplated whether her experience equated rape or sexual assault and subtly blamed herself for the events of that evening. Her revelation was an upsetting and emotional one and to be candid, in the moment that her story unravelled and revealed itself, I felt entirely useless. All at once I wished for the discussion to become a moment of consciousness raising for Terri, for her to realise that she was not at fault and thus reflect on her experience in a new light. At the same time, I wanted to ask her to share more details of that evening in an effort to make it abundantly clear that the man who had taken advantage of her that evening was at fault and that he should face the appropriate consequences (what these consequences would be I am unsure but perhaps this just shows the how angry I was that Terri had experienced this). I knew that this was not necessarily within the scope of the discussion but that any consciousness raising should come about organically from the women themselves without my input. I was also aware that, as Brannen (1988: 559, 560) suggests, my powerful urge to help failed to recognise that such feelings often have more to do with helping the helper (myself) than those who are in need.

Although my wanting to help may have been well intentioned, I was concerned more with my own feelings in that moment than with Terri's struggle. Instead, the best course open to the researcher in these instances may in fact be to listen and to endure and share in the person's pain rather than to brush it aside too quickly with sympathetic words (Brannen, 1988: 559, 560). Putting my self-interest aside, I knew I had to be silent yet empathetic, I gave Terri her time to weave through her story and thoughts. I reassured her that she had done nothing wrong, I thanked her for sharing her experience and when she concluded, I asked her how she felt and whether she was ok.

With this considered, and I take influence from McQueen's (2016: 88) research here, as it became obvious to me that rather than become the 'helper' in this scenario, my resulting role in the context of the sessions ought to switch between listener (demonstrating, for example, active listening through eye contact), collaborator (in making appreciative noises, laughing or self-disclosing) and a more active role which could be described as 'prober' (when asking for clarification of a point or leaving silences hanging to elicit more information). Ultimately, I wanted the sessions to be a safe space for the women and my key responsibility to them was not of helper but of supporter.

At the beginning of each session, I made it clear to the women that their comfort was of the utmost importance, I told them that should the conversation become distressing, emotional or indeed triggering for them in anyway, that we will stop or move on. Their well-being was more important than any data collection I was embarking on.

4.3.4 Focus Groups: The Importance of Rapport

Rapport-building between researcher and participant is not only invited in an interview involving the disclosure of sensitive material; I agree with Miles (2019: 4) who argues that it is required to empower the participant to feel that they are in a sufficiently safe space to not have to self-regulate their disclosures, which in this project included heterosexual experiences, empowerment and sexual consent. Indeed, prioritising the need for rapport between myself and the women, as well as creating a comforting and supportive space for the few hours we spoke seemed for many women to create a trusting environment, encouraging lengthy and uninhibited narratives. My position then, as a feminist researcher, was to dissolve the lines between the researcher and the researched through establishing rapport and seeking to reduce power differences (Ritchie and Barker, 2005: 5).

As I have previously mentioned, many of the women involved in this research shared that they enjoyed the sessions, they explained how they had been therapeutic and cathartic. In fact, after my first focus group I distinctly remember Claire messaging me to organise a follow up session in which she commented that the focus group "was brilliant" and that she looked forward to continuing our discussion. It is not my intention here to boast about the success of my focus groups or my own skills as a qualitative researcher; rather I want to make it clear that at this point I recognised the focus group process to be an interactive one in which both "sides" contribute to the outcome (Enosh and Buchbinder, 2005: 589). Here, I saw the relationship between myself and the women in my focus group as one of conversational partners, as collaborators in this research rather than one of researcher and research object or respondent (Rubin and Rubin, 1995 in Enosh and Buchbinder, 2005: 589).

Interestingly, I was simultaneously within and outside of the worlds of the women in my focus groups (Bain and Nash, 2006, in Miles, 2019: 4). My status as "researcher" exploring the experiences of a "participant" placed me in a specific position (Miles, 2019: 4). Equally though, as a woman who had once been an undergraduate student, albeit in the UK and not the U.S., my research had the potential to fall into the traps of ethnocentrism, which Miles (2019: 4) outlines. This is precisely because I was observing and interacting with a demographic in which I was once located myself as an 'insider' (Miles, 2019: 4). In addition to this, interestingly the construction of 'the university' – and in my case, my position as 'Visiting Scholar', a role which to myself and others admittedly sounds somewhat imposing and decidedly professional - arguably holds a cachet for participants that automatically implies authority and trustworthiness (Miles, 2019: 5). As Miles (2019: 5) suggests, both the construction of being affiliated with a university and holding a position as a visiting scholar functions as a kind of "phantom body" that legitimates the research process as something ethically regulated, and as a result, the researcher quickly becomes entrusted with intimate details that may not be disclosed elsewhere.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

Level 2 ethical approval was obtained from Edinburgh University School of Law before I commenced my fieldwork. It was not until I arrived in the U.S. that I realised that that I would also need to be granted ethical approval from the University in the U.S. as a first-time researcher in the field, I was somewhat naïve about this beforehand. The process, an International Research Board study review, was expedited due to my short stay in the country

and was relatively straightforward. I will reflect on these two ethical processes now and appreciate the importance of them; The U.S. university had a responsibility for its students and Edinburgh had responsibility for me. Neither of these ethical reviews were static, rather I consider to them to be more dynamic in that when it was becoming clear that I was increasingly unable to find fraternity brothers to talk to me about their experiences, my ethical questions and processes were amended. This involved me explaining the reason behind my change in focus from men to women, as well as the protocols that I would implement to protect the participants. As my research would delve into topics of sensitive nature there were several areas of ethical concern, which existed both for the participants and myself as a researcher that needed to be fully considered.

Ethics relate to all aspects of the research process: gaining access to research, settings and populations, the creation of a theoretical framework, the research methods used and the writing up of the findings themselves (Brannen, 1993). As Holland and Ramazanoglu (1994: 3462) rightly state, the impact of interviews involving sensitive topics on *interviewers* should not be underestimated - it is true that at times the focus groups were emotionally draining. Often during the few hours that we spent talking, the women in my research were revealing painful stories of sexual assault as well as more confusing, nebulous experiences of sex they were subtly pressured into. Although my intention is not to imply that I somehow suffered because of the disclosure of these stories - it was far harder for the women to reveal these experiences to the group and me than it was for me to listen to them - but I can't deny that I would leave the focus group sessions with the stories replaying in my mind. It was during these moments that I would rely on the appropriate, personal support systems in place. My supervisors both in the United States and in Edinburgh, my partner and my family, all alleviated my worries and concerns that followed an emotional focus group session through their unwavering care and comfort.

However, it is also important to make it clear that more often than not these focus groups were somewhat exciting for me. I was shocked and saddened by the stories shared but the women that they belonged to were funny and quick, strong and effervescent and often inspiring. I found myself laughing at their jokes and my own self-disclosure followed some of their stories. When they informed me that they would be interested in talking to me again in the future, I felt accomplished - for me there was a sense that we, as a collective, had built a connection with mutual support. So, although the topic area of this research was difficult at times, the overall experience during the focus group sessions was overwhelmingly positive for me.

4.4.1 Consent and Confidentiality

All stages of this research were designed to take into account the fundamental ethical concern, which was the safety and comfort of the women involved in the focus group discussions. Informed consent was obtained through participants via a consent form as well as a document which provided an in-depth explanation of the purpose of the research and all possible uses of the research data. I asked each woman to read both of these papers and sign if they were happy to participate prior to the start of the session. Included in these documents were also a list of contact details from local rape crisis centres, therapy organisations and to other useful groups for the women to make use of if necessary. Before beginning the sessions I also verbally explained what we, as a group, would cover and included a content warning of sorts before the discussion began. The latter reiterated the importance of their comfort, that it was paramount to any discussion to be had. The content warning also offered me a way to give the women further notice that what would ensue in the session may be of a sensitive and emotional nature, that should it become too challenging at any point, we would stop the session and that they had every right and freedom to leave. Clearly, my intention was to minimise any distress of the participants and as I have previously outlined in this chapter, I saw my role as someone who should be listening to and supporting the women at all times. For some women this required me to simply pass them tissues, to thank them for opening up and in the case of Terri for example, to stop probing when I knew she was not comfortable sharing any more of her story. I had to gauge and interpret what I thought each individual required as support and tailor my response accordingly.

Generally speaking, it was important for me to monitor and be aware of the stress level of the group. When certain topics would be emotionally charged and illicit intense responses this meant intervening where necessary (e.g., stopping the recording, asking the participant if they are comfortable to continue). At the time of writing now, I feel somewhat a weight of responsibility, and to be frank for a moment, I hope that my listening - and even more so my responses to the women when they revealed emotional experiences - was appropriate, to the degree that it made them feel they were in a compassionate space, free from judgement. Being aware of how participants may feel when they leave the group and the effects of the disclosure of sensitive, emotional experiences meant that I would casually debrief at the end of each focus group session. This involved me asking the women how they felt and what they thought of our discussion, allowing the women to discuss and share their reactions. Confidentiality was a major

ethical consideration in this research that functioned in tandem with the women's wellbeing. To ensure confidentiality, for example, all audio files and subsequent transcripts were stored on password-protected computers since the time of interviewing. Conducting focus groups meant that I as researcher knew the identity of participants, but it was essential to stress to the participants that no one other than myself would be able to gain access to any data or information once it had been collected.

4.5 Data Analysis: Practice

The intention of this qualitative research was not to generalise to all women (and the reason why this cannot be done will be explored in the subsequent section of this chapter), but to explore the meanings ascribed by the women to their experiences. As Silverman (2001: 96; see also, McQueen, 2016: 82) notes, widespread cultural assumptions underlie any story being told, including within an interview setting, and it is these assumptions which shine light primarily on the concept of gender and heterosexuality and how these are understood (and by extension, constructed) by women in this thesis. All of the focus groups were recorded digitally and upon returning to Edinburgh, all of the interviews were transcribed verbatim by myself and uploaded to the programme, NVivo.

After re-reading each transcription in NVivo I began to code the transcription text according to an index of themes based on the reviewed literature. Considering the thematic analysis for a moment, at the start these themes were broad, ranging from women's pleasures and desires, their stories of sexual assault and misconduct, their encounters with men's ignorance to women's pleasure, to their experiences of a sexual double standard. Later on, as the coding of the data progressed, it became clear that more solid sub-themes were emerging within the broader ones. These related to the young women's experiences of male power, their claims to sexual agency and the self-work (in the form of emotion, safety and sex) that they carried out to manage their own and others emotions as well as sexual scenarios. In my analysis of the data, I not only considered the possible emerging themes, but also attempted to extract information as to the discourses illustrated in the women's talk. I paid particular attention, for example, to how young women's, and men's, heterosexuality was constructed. Whether traditional heterosexual discourses of female sexuality, which follows the imperative that women be passive and reactive to the male sexual drive, still existed in the young women's life worlds. As well as this, I wanted to explore whether alternative discourses opened up a space for women to

challenge and resist these dominant constructions, instead positioning female sexuality as positive, acknowledging their desires and needs. Additionally, I attempted to focus on the function of the young women's narratives in the data. I coded the transcripts according to stories of contemporary sexual harms (e.g., non-consensual condom removal and consented to unwanted sex). This built up a nuanced picture of the women's experiences and allowed their stories to form the basis of the research. Using this three pronged approach to data analysis, considering the thematic, discourse and narrative in respect to the data set, allowed me to identify the pervasive, complex and often hidden concepts of power, agency, gendered roles within sex and relationships.

4.5.1 The Importance of Stories

The idea of 'uncovering' stories is particularly pertinent to this research. For Plummer (1995: 21) we all tell stories about ourselves: narratives about who we are and how we came to be that way that we repeat to ourselves and others to make sense of our lives and to present ourselves in certain ways. He notes that:

> People tell sexual stories to assemble a sense of self and identity. Sexual stories lay down routes to a coherent past, mark off boundaries and contrasts in the present, and provide both a channel and a shelter for the future (Plummer, 1995: 172).

This thesis specifically examines the sexual stories of young, heterosexual women, the narratives of their intimate life, focused especially on pleasures, desires, the gendered and the contradictory (Plummer, 1995). And, as Plummer (1995: 7) rightly maintains, these are part of the wider discourses and ideologies present in society. As Maynes and colleagues write:

> The stories that people tell about their lives are never simply individual, but are told in historically specific times and settings and draw on the rules and models in circulation that govern how story elements link together in narrative logics (Maynes et al, 2008: 2).

Stories do not remain static but are lodged in specific (situational, economic, historical, cultural) social moments (Plummer, 1995: 63). In this light, personal narratives provide evidence of a storyteller's viewpoint and experiences as well as the social and cultural milieu in which they live (Bano and Pierce, 2013: 225). Sexual stories have become extremely popular, with people presenting narratives of their sexual behaviour and identity (such as the non-heterosexual

'coming out' story) in a range of different ways (Plummer, 1995: 4, Ritchie and Barker, 2005: 2). These sexual stories, according to Plummer (1995: 4; see also, Ritchie and Barker, 2005: 2), have gained a power and prominence in recent years, with certain stories now having their time to be heard. Take for example the 2017 #MeToo movement – MeToo was first used in 2006 by activist Tarana Burke to raise awareness of the pervasiveness of sexual assault for women of colour - a time in which many women across industries came forward and spoke of their experiences of sexual harassment, assault and violence. For Weeks (1998; see also, Ritchie and Barker, 2005): 2), a moment, or movement, of this kind - at which particular sexual stories begin to be told publicly – suggests that these stories begin to improve recognition, respect and rights for the story-tellers, and in turn, this creates a new type of intimate or sexual citizen.

Important to note here however, is that moments and/or movements like that of #MeToo can become significantly class skewed. As socialist feminist Barbara Ehrenreich (2017; see also, Matthews, 2019) notes, #MeToo gave voice to actresses, but what of housekeepers? It is essential when thinking about the movements and/or moments that Weeks identifies, to consider who is able to speak and who is not. Michelle Fine's (2009: 63; see also, Guidroz and Berger, 2009: 63) words ring true here when she writes that "gender matters deeply, but only in intimate relation with race, ethnicity, class, context, place, and the fraying public sector safety net." And as Matthews (2019: 268) rightly suggests, the sex frame and its intersections with the labour frame must always be considered.

Although I am cautious not to overinflate the reach of the research I present here, perhaps it can form at least part of a moment of sexual story telling (Ritchie and Barker, 2005). Ritchie and Barker (2005: 2, 3) neatly outline that perhaps those of us that do sex research are what Plummer (1995: 21) terms, the sexual 'story-tellers' and story 'coaxers'. Both the 'story-tellers' and 'coaxers' are, according to Plummer (1995: 21) vital for the successful telling of a sexual story, along with an audience to consume said stories. I do not identify myself and my position in this research in line with Ritchie and Barker (2005: 3), who consider themselves 'story-tellers' as they are people who produce their own sexual stories in their own personal and academic lives. However, I do consider myself, to an extent, somewhat of a 'coaxer', since at the time of data collection, I possessed some power to muster stories from people, as a researcher interviewing heterosexual women, thus bringing these stories to an academic audience (Ritchie and Barker, 2005: 3; Plummer, 1995: 21;).

4.5.2 Narrative Analysis

If, as Maynes (2008: 2) and colleagues write, an individual constructs a sense of self by telling stories or "personal narratives" which describe, in their view, "the evolution of an individual life over time and in social context", it becomes necessary to adopt narrative inquiry where stories and story-telling form the basis of the research project. Consequently, the research design adopted here is one of narrative inquiry. Set within human stories of experience, narrative inquiry offers researchers a rich fieldwork to investigate the way individuals experience the world depicted through their stories (Webster and Mertova, 2007). Put simply, this is the study of experience understood narratively (Clandinin and Huber, 2010). Bano and Pierce outline the importance of a feminist narrative inquiry, writing:

> Among feminist scholars the analysis of personal narrative sources such as oral histories, in-depth interviews, and autobiographies has served a number of important purposes: to introduce marginalized voices to the historical record (for example those of women or globally subaltern people); to create counter narratives that refute universal claims; or to conduct empirical studies that are more inclusive than previous research (Bano and Pierce, 2013: 226).

In this study, narrative inquiry will be embarked upon through young women telling their stories and a writing up of these accounts. Narrative inquiry will allow for an understanding of stories related to heterosexual women's pleasures, desires, sexual encounters, fears and concerns in the most organic way, placing them within the teller's social situation, understanding the placing of events and experiences and the importance given to them (Maple and Edwards, 2010). Additionally, as the research is potentially sensitive in nature, narrative inquiry acts as the most respectful way to "honour" the young women's stories without interference from myself as a researcher (Maple and Edwards, 2010). Bano and Pierce (2010: 236) note that as feminist scholars, not only does our ethical responsibility lie in listening and listening well, but also in pressing for these stories to be heard. Thus, a method of this kind does not impose assumptions onto the women's stories, but rather allows for a concentrated focus on their experiences and feelings, facilitating an emphasis on individual 'meaning-making' (Ling, 2013: 32).

This dovetails quite neatly with the aim, as explored early on in this chapter, of standpoint theory, as arguably this can be executed most authentically, with women telling their own personal stories and respecting these narratives as part of the research. As Bano and Pierce (2013: 229) argue, this method of sourcing personal narratives provides a unique methodological insight for feminist scholars including social, cultural, and historical specificity of various locations in terms of subjectivity, experience, emotion, and imagination that other kinds of research, e.g. surveys or statistical analysis of demographic variables, cannot. In this light then, narrative analysis addresses and speaks back to many of the issues raised by feminist standpoint theorists who emphasize the value of women's voices and subjectivity in research (Bano and Pierce, 2013: 229).

4.5.3 Consciousness Raising

A guiding principle of some feminist epistemologies is that consciousness raising (CR) is a way of seeing and naming (Cook and Fonow, 1986; Montel, 1999). As Montel (1999: 54) notes, bringing a group of women together to talk about issues that are important to them creates, even if only temporarily, connections and solidarity among women that contribute to feminist consciousness and social action. Although CR was not an explicit purpose of my research and I did not set out to purposefully use it as a method, some moments during the focus groups emerged as consciousness raising (as opposed to sharing an experience) and I would like to explore these here.

Indeed, many of the women involved in my focus groups told me that they found the exercise of talking in a group setting quite cathartic. They revealed that the process was similar to group therapy in that it offered them a space to reflect on and re-evaluate their experiences. Describing the focus group in this way, one can see ties to the method of CR, which was a staple of the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s and 1970s (Montel, 1999: 40). Although an important practice – and, as mentioned, not one on which this research is based, but rather a practice which occurred organically rather than was planned for - CR *is* different from conducting feminist focus groups. As Montel (1999: 53, 54) points out, the former are leaderless groups that meet over an extended period of time for the purpose of discussing personal experiences. Contrastingly, in focus groups the researcher acts as leader and the group typically meet only once (Montel, 1999: 53, 54). While the primary purpose of CR groups is to affect the consciousness of the immediate participants, the purpose of feminist focus groups is to produce data for analysis and publication (Montel, 1999: 53, 54). Importantly then, any

conscious raising involved in the focus groups conducted as a part of this thesis comes as a welcome side effect rather than as the primary goal. The point, however, is that both can be empowering and can effect transformation of patriarchal relations (Montel, 1999: 53, 54).

So, a consciousness raising of sorts became apparent a number of times in my focus groups, particularly for example, when discussing the phenomenon of non-consensual condom removal during sexual intercourse, popularly referred to as stealthing (Brodsky, 2017). Many women involved in the focus group at the time reported having had experiences of this kind and when describing it, some women were unsure as to how to label their experience. More often than not, they avoided considering it as rape or sexual assault, instead referring to it as a bizarre, one-off experience that left them confused. Here is an excerpt of an exchange where the focus is non-consensual condom removal; this discussion came after I had asked the five women involved in the focus group discussion, to what extent they felt empowered to 'just say no' to sex they didn't want.

Piper: So, *[gestures to Tara in the group]* you were there for this, there was one night where we had an event and I was very, very drunk, I mean, I wasn't too drunk but… Uhm, we were making out and watching tv and we went to his room and at that point, like –
Tara: We *[herself and Piper]* were both in the same room with two guys and we were just about done with this mixer *[a party]* and they had invited us back to watch tv and we were all four sitting on the couch and all of a sudden he *[one of the two guys]* like picks her *[Piper]* up, literally picks her up and takes her to his room and I like look over at James and I was just like I don't think that's ok. Then I think I like called out and I was like "Piper are you ok?" I think I said something, I like texted you and called you or something -
P: Yeah, she didn't just leave me but… I did have sex with the boy *[who picked her up and took her to his room]* and I haven't talked to him since and uhm, it was just a very odd situation
At this point Piper gestures to two other women in the group and asks them the following:
P: Is it weird if I talk about my condom thing?
T: No, no
P: So, I asked him to wear a condom, he did at first and then he just decided to take it off in the middle of it and he finished inside of me and I *[pauses]*. The next morning I had to go and get Plan B and I remember, I think I was talking to you *[gestures to another women in the group]* and I was just crying because at that point I was very, very drunk during when we were having sex and for him to just disregard what I asked him to do, uhm, bothered me a lot as it should

have… I guess… And I just think, I think if a girl is having sex with you and is requesting something of you, it is not that hard to wear a condom –

T: It is really not -

P: And like, I didn't realise he had taken the condom off until it was too late and that bothered me more than –

T: Because it is a violation

P: Yeah -

T: It is not something you were expecting

P: That same night though after I had sobered up a little bit and I realised what happened, I was putting my clothes on and I was like "I am going home" and he was like "No stay the night" and I was like "No, like I wanna go home." And he just kept pulling me back to bed and I was like "No!" And I started getting kind of panicked and I was just… Because he was being very like *[says this forcefully and with emphasis]* "No come lay down." And I finally got all my clothes on and I literally ran home, like ran, not that he was chasing me, but I was just like frightened –

Jen: It was late too, like you, you text me on the way and it was the middle, I woke up in the morning and saw it

P: Yeah and it was just a really odd and like weird *[pauses]*. It was just a weird situation

T: And it was hard because like I know that I did ask her *[Piper]* if she was ok but she was in front of the guy so –

P: So, she like called out like "Are you ok?" and I was like "Yeah I am good" but I really didn't wanna have sex with this guy that much and I kind of felt like we were in his room and he like -

T: You felt pressured

P: Yeah like all the… I don't know I just felt pressured to even though –

At this point Piper trails off but picks up her point

P: And the part that bothered me the most about that night is the fact that he did take his condom off, like that whole… If we would have just had sex with a condom normally it wouldn't have bothered me really –

Chiara: Of course

P: But just because of like what happened that's where I like I have never talked to him since he texted me the next day and I didn't –

T: Yeah you avoid him at all costs

P: I avoid him and like we saw him last night and I just go to the other side of the room I don't even wanna look at him and like, I dunno if he is doing that to other girls, because like he could have… I could have been pregnant you know
T: You don't know you could have –
P: I could have got an STD, yeah
C: Even if those things didn't happen –
P: It is still a violation

We can see here how women's interactions with each other not only enhance the flow of ideas and information, but that these interactions are consciousness-raising in that they encourage women to recognize the patterns in their shared experience (Montel, 1999). Piper shares her story and reflects upon in it in some depth. The other women in the group - they all happened to be close friends and members of the same sorority – support her in talking about her experience and help her to find ways to better articulate the harm that she felt as a consequence of non-consensual condom removal.

The group interaction that takes place here as a result of Piper's story enhances the flow of ideas and affords the women an opportunity to raise their consciousness in that they collectively realise and make sense of a group commonality, in this case heterosexual men's failure to make condom use a priority in sexual encounters. In this research then, focus groups are used and a raising of consciousness comes about organically through a reveal of sorts to the participants, of the overt and hidden aspects of problematic experiences in everyday life (Raymond and Padilla, 1996: 534) especially, in relation to, in this specific passage, heterosexual women's experiences of sex, consent and condom use.

4.5.4 Discourse Analysis

I analysed the data from my focus group interviews by using a form of discourse analysis influenced primarily by feminist scholarship, for example the work of Nicola Gavey. For Gavey (1989: 466) discourse analysis assumes that research participants' talk can be taken as illustrative of the range of discourses circulating in a particular place, time, and culture. Moreover, I agree with Gavey (1986: 466) in that language and discourse constitute meaning, and therefore particular discourses enable and constrain people's options for how to be and act in the social world. Analysing the ways in which sex is talked about helps to make sense of how cultural imperatives may be silently (or explicitly) upheld, and highlights ways in which they may be

potentially resisted (Gavey, 1989). As Gavey (1989: 467) notes, discourse analysis involves the careful reading of texts (e. g., transcripts of focus group interviews in this case), with a view to discerning discursive patterns of meaning, contradictions, and inconsistencies. It is an approach that identifies, and names, language processes people use to constitute their own and others' understanding of personal and social phenomena, and these processes are related to the reproduction of, or challenge to, the distribution of power between social groups and within institutions. (Gavey, 1989: 467).

The particular form of discourse analysis that I present involves identifying the social discourses available to women in a given culture and society at a given time. I identified and interpreted patterns in the discourse (in the text of the focus groups, i.e. in the women's words) (Wood and Kroger, 2000; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) - essentially, this framework encourages repeated examination of the data and careful identification of the key features of talk (Thomas, Stelzl and Lafrance, 2017: 286). Following Thomas, Stelzel and Lafrance's (2017: 286; see also, Wood and Kroger, 2000: 5) use of discourse analysis, I paid attention to what the women in my focus groups said, how it was said, and the functions of their accounts, i.e. 'what talk is doing and achieving.' It is a case of what is being said in the data but also what is happening; whose voices are the loudest, who is interjecting and who isn't. I have decided to focus on the textual here, the features of talk, speech and interactions because, as Thomas, Stelzl and Lafrance (2017: 300) note, they can be seen as attempts at meaning making in the absence of adequate vocabularies. Thomas, Stelzl and Lafrance (2017: 300) rightly point out that dominant discourses fail to speak to women's unwanted sexual experiences and as a result of this, women are left having to attempt to speak out and around the recognised words.

Marjorie DeVault's (1990: 100) writing in this space has influenced my choice to analyse the data through a discursive lens, particularly as she notes that when researchers write about women's lives, whatever the methods of collecting and analysing interview data be, we (as researchers) confront the dangers of mislabelling that can result from the use of language that does not fit. For DeVault (1990: 100) then, a feminist strategy in sociology must extend to the language of our texts: we must choose words carefully and creatively, with attention to the consequences of naming experience. DeVault (1990) gives an example of how she employed a discursive analytical technique in her work on uncovering the neglected aspects of women's housework. After coding her data in the traditional way, DeVault (1990: 102) expressed that the analysis really began when a particular phrase seemed to demand investigation, as a result

she would pay more and more attention to the *ways* things were said. DeVault (1990: 102) was especially interested in difficulties of expression, as she calls it: "those fascinating moments when respondents get stuck and work at articulating thoughts they were not used to sharing." This halting, hesitant, tentative talk signals the realm of not quite articulated experience, where standard vocabulary is inadequate and where a respondent tries to speak from experience (DeVault, 1990: 102, 103, 104). DeVault (1990: 102, 103, 104) listened to this kind of talk and became aware that her transcripts were filled with notations of women saying things like: "you know" in sentences like "I'm more careful about feeding her, you know, kind of a breakfast." This seemed an incidental feature of DeVault's (1990: 102, 103, 104) respondent's speech, but the phrase was not as empty as it appeared. Studying her transcripts, DeVault (1990: 102, 103, 104) goes on to note that in many instances, the use of "you know" can mean something like, "OK, this next bit is going to be a little tricky. I can't say it quite right, but help me out a little; meet me halfway and you'll understand what I mean." If this is so, this simple phrase offers a new way to think about the data in that "you know" no longer seems like stumbling inarticulateness but appears to signal a request for understanding (DeVault, 1990: 102, 103, 104).

The goal of my analysis is similar to that of Thomas, Stelzl and Lafrance (2017: 300) in that I intend to explore patterns of labelling certain kinds of acts (or not as the case may be), as related to the women's heterosexual experiences. In doing so and I want to honour the "linguistic ingenuity" of the women who negotiate a lack of available language for constructing meaning of consensual but unwanted sexual experiences (Thomas, Stelzl and Lafrance, 2017: 300).

4.6 Analytical Framework: Reflexivity

In writing this thesis I have been influenced by theories and practices of reflexivity and I intend to, and have attempted to, remain reflexive throughout my research regarding my positionality and politics. Most simply, reflexivity refers to a certain level of consciousness and entails a self-awareness about the recognition that as researchers, we are part of the social world that we study (Palaganas et al, 2017: 427). Reflexivity then is a continuous process of reflection by researchers on their values (Parahoo, 2006 in Palaganas et al, 2017: 427) and of recognizing, examining, and understanding how their social background, location and assumptions effect their research practice (Palaganas et al, 2017: 427). To be reflexive for a moment here, for example, I am a white, heterosexual, able bodied, middle class and cisgender woman and the

world I inhabit is a privileged one because of these identities. However, it is important to be conscious that, as Hewer (2016: 99) puts it, reflexivity does not exist simply to "purge the sins" of positionality and nor is it intended to be used as way to relieve oneself of one's privilege. In my work I currently consider reflexivity, from an individualistic, autobiographical perspective, acknowledging the effects that my cultural and social position has on the production of knowledge. But I am also locating my research in an understanding of reflexivity which goes beyond this self-disclosure to consider reflexivity in a Bourdieusian sense, drawing on his notion of reflexive sociology.

Reflexivity for Bourdieu does not refer simply to endless textual and autobiographical referentiality, or to the unconscious dispositions of the individual researcher, but to an examination of the 'epistemological unconscious' and the 'social organisation' of the discipline or field (of sociology) (Kenway and McLeod, 2004: 530). Here, then, the authorial subject is displaced, and research products become social products (Hewer, 2016: 99). Furthermore, for Bourdieu reflexivity is an epistemological principle which advises sociologists, as 'objectifying subjects', to turn their objectifying gaze upon themselves and become aware of the hidden assumptions that structure their research (Karakayali, 2004: 352). Without this reflexive move, sociology loses its chances to provide an analysis of the social world (Karakayali, 2004: 352). So, as a researcher embarking on a feminist research project, I am seeking to keep to the fore a consciousness of the 'space of my point of view' of my own position and disposition within this field, as Kenway and McLeod (2004: 541) put it. And this includes the effect of my presence on the perspectives offered by the various participants in my focus groups, and my own attachment to and construction of particular perspectives and truths (Kenway and McLeod, 2004: 541).

4.7 Methodological Limitations

The research design and methods employed in this work has provided a rich set of data to explore the ways in which women's heterosexual lives unfold, however, it is not without its limitations and these are critical to reflect upon. The focus group interviews and conversations had flowed well and were robust, but upon re-reading the transcription of the interviews during the coding process it was clear that some of the questions I posed to the women were, to an extent, redundant. At the beginning of the sessions I would begin a conversation about the meaning behind the term hooking-up. I thought this broader question would help ease into the discussion and spark some interest. Although the latter was true and the women's answers were

thought-provoking, sometimes the discussion went on for too long and I ought to have moved on to the meatier - for want of a better term - questions that pertained to their pleasures, desires, their concerns and worries.

The most fundamental shortfall of this research is the lack of diversity in the demographic of women it includes, the majority of whom were white, middle class and cis-gender. Representation matters in social research in order to delve deeper into a diversity of experiences and stories. As it has been stated several times, it is evident at this point in the thesis that any findings that come about as a result of this research cannot be generalised to *all* women. And truthfully, my findings can be seen to lack a consideration of the intersections of identity such as race, class, sexual orientation, disability and age with that of gender. Admittedly, the institution in which I was conducting fieldwork was and is a predominantly white institution with 43% of the undergraduate and graduate student population identifying as white, 20% Hispanic or Latino, 17% Asian and 3% Black or African American. It is arguable then that my sample reflects the environment at the institution, in that there was already a limited number of students of colour at the University and thus this was perpetuated and reproduced in my own study.

Despite this, I do feel regret in what, in my view, is indeed a drawback of my work due to similar demographic sampling across the focus groups. I say this because, regarding my overall theory and because of the sampling, I cannot hypothesise how less privileged women might experience or talk about the themes of heterosexuality, power, pleasure and agency. At the time of data generation, I was well aware of the similarity in identities of the women I was talking to. Perhaps had I realised and accepted sooner the difficult in recruiting fraternity brothers I would have been able to shift my focus to women earlier – rather than 3 months into a 6-month fieldwork trip - and diversified my predominantly white, middle class, cis sample. It is true that each researcher brings particular values and particular self-identities to the research (Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1994: 3333). While these values, identities and experiences do not rigidly determine particular points of view, they do give researchers variable standpoints in relation to subjects of research (Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1994: 3333). I question then whether I was sampling according to the characteristics of my own identity. As a result, I also ponder the significance of my data given that it represents and speaks to an already considerably powerful and privileged group in feminist research – white, middle class, cis women.

Black feminists have, correctly, challenged the universalist pretentions in much of feminist research and writing, arguing rightly that this scholarship is based on white women's experiences and that such researchers should acknowledge the ways in which social divisions around race differentially structure women's positions and experiences (Edwards, 1996: 169). That is not to say that the stories and experiences in this work are not valid and worthy of critical thought. Rather, it is my worry that because this research draws on the experiences of predominantly white, middle class cis women, it is further exacerbating the universalist pretentions which Edward's (1996: 169) highlights. It is thus important that this work does not re-centre or over-centre white, middle class, cis women, who have long been at the heart of feminist qualitative studies. This limitation is not one I want to repeat, so much so that in any future feminist-focused research endeavours which I undertake, it is crucial I do not ignore the power relationships between race, sexuality, class and gender, the ways in which these things cut across each other in people's experience (Cain, 1986: 265 in Ramazanoglu, 1980: 436), and make the individual experience so richly different and worthy of representation.

4.8 Conclusion

The topic of investigation in this research has shifted considerably from when I began my doctoral study, to the time of writing, some three years on. Empirically, this shift was necessary and led by situational constraints – e.g. difficulty finding a sample of fraternity men - at the time of fieldwork and it is thus my view that the change in focus has occurred for just and valid reasons. The use of focus groups, as well as follow-up discussions has consequently led to rich and multi-layered data, offering a complex analysis of women's heterosexual lives, of how power is exercised in heterosex, how the women claim resistance to power and how they engage in self-work to manage themselves, others and their consequent sexual encounters. Further to this, and a factor which I hope demonstrates some rigour in this thesis, is that my research intentions have stayed the same throughout. My interest in analysing experiences and practices of power along gendered lines has not wavered; I have always intended to ground my study in a feminist epistemology; and have continually considered as crucial the need for rapport and respect for the individuals involved. Indeed, my very early thoughts on what my doctoral thesis would look like, before I began my course of study, involved the desire for very broad discussions with women about their experiences of rape and sexual assault. Perhaps then, the changes I have outlined here have been necessary for my work to, in a sense, come full circle. My utmost hope is that in the subsequent chapters of this thesis, the women's shared stories, reflections and experiences will be honoured.

Chapter Five – Women's Constructions of Pleasure and Desire

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is about women living heterosexual lives and their reflections of sexual pleasure in said lives. The method of exploration of this topic, as explained in the previous chapter, was multiple focus groups with women, talking about all aspects and natures of their heterosexual relationships. The women reflected upon their pleasure in heterosexual encounters in significant detail throughout the focus group sessions. These conversations came about once I had probed whether the women I was speaking to felt their pleasure was prioritised in the heterosex that they were having. I chose to focus on the topic of pleasure as much of the literature in this area details how young women in heterosexual relationships feel their own pleasures and desires are often elided – I wanted to see if this was true for the women I spoke to. I also explored whether they felt it possible to speak up and articulate their sexual desires to the people they were having sex with. From these questions a number of matters became apparent and the women spoke freely, perhaps because they were all familiar with one and other, some even being close friends. Nevertheless, women admitted that for them, faking orgasm was commonplace during sex. Building on this, the women identified a stark difference in the ways in which their pleasure and that of men's was prioritised in heterosex. They also disclosed a clear distinction between how pleasure exists in non-committal, brief hook up encounters as compared to more long-term, established relationships. Whilst pleasure was being considered, conversations around the complexities associated with it developed. This included the women revealing how empowered they felt in their heterosexual choices and the responsibility which often accompanied said choices. Given the aforementioned topics, this chapter considers pleasure according to the following structure: faking orgasm, pleasure inequality, pleasure and its complexities with a look to emotional closeness and men's vulnerability, pleasure in hook ups vs long term relationships, and finally the nuances of women's empowerment, looking twofold to both their subjective experiences of sexual agency and the significance of male sexual attention.

The penultimate chapter of this thesis will discuss the two major findings of this research. In this discussion chapter I identify four hypotheses that become central to this thesis as a result of

the major findings and explore these in more detail in relation to the theoretical conceptualisations of power and emotion work.

5.2 Faking It

I'd like to reflect on some of the ways that pleasure was discussed, paying particular attention to women's orgasm in heterosexual encounters here. As I have touched upon, many women involved in the focus groups revealed that they found it hard to orgasm during sex, and some went so far as to share that they often faked orgasm as a result. I want to be clear that it is not my intention to centralise orgasm as a necessity for 'good' sex here. In fact, later on in the chapter I consider and examine the ways in which the women in this study experienced pleasure precisely in the absence of orgasm. Indeed, as Fahs and Plante (2017: 35) note, measuring sexual satisfaction or good sex based on the presence of orgasm, would present serious methodological and conceptual challenges to researchers.

Nevertheless, during my very first focus group, Claire quite plainly (breaking down any awkwardness within the group in the process) declared: "oh yeah and I have definitely faked, all the time!" She went on further and added to this statement, explaining that she often felt "a bit on edge the whole time" during sex and chalked this feeling up to her lack of orgasm. Other women, like Beth, divulged to the group that she too had never had an orgasm. Beth mentioned quite honestly that she "never really got a lot of pleasure out of sex". Women in a separate focus group meanwhile, acknowledged that faking orgasm was a common occurrence. When this was revealed in this particular group, I suggested that this seemed to be a pattern cropping up in many of my other conversations. I added that it didn't seem to matter whether women have 'finished' (using the women's own words, meaning to come to orgasm) during the sexual encounters they were discussing. To this question-come-observation of mine, one woman, Jen, explained frankly that: "you just give up afterwards". What she meant by this was that after not reaching orgasm for some time during sex, she gives up totally on the endeavour. To that, another woman in the group, Piper, responded, echoing and contextualising Jen's view:

Piper: Guys have asked [me] like, 'Are you done?'… I don't wanna feel like: 'Oh it's taking too long, or I am taking too much of their time' and I will just say: 'Yeah' and they will stop right when I say yeah.

Once Piper came forward with this statement, many of the women in the group agreed with her. However, when I pressed the group as to what they thought men would say if they revealed to them that they hadn't reached orgasm, the following exchange took place:

Jen: They would be like well: 'can we be done soon like how much longer?'
Claire: I don't know! I *[laughs and pauses]* I have no idea what they would say
Piper: Yeah, I never thought about that
C: that's interesting!
J: like with my boyfriend I say it and he's like: 'how much longer, are you close, give me an eta?!'

Reaching orgasm was thought of as too lengthy a task for men to endure. It seemed to me that the women were reflecting upon the task of men *trying* to bring them to orgasm in a way that centred orgasms to be chore-like, almost an inconvenience and arguably, poorly understood. The women I spoke to were concerned that in an effort to reach orgasm they would be "taking up too much of their (men's) time" as Piper put it. These ideas echo those of Jackson and Scott (1997; see also, Roberts, 1995), who note that while male orgasm is seen as natural and inevitable, women's orgasm requires work and is difficult to achieve. Although the young women in this work didn't clearly explain *why* it was that they so commonly fake orgasm or give up on it as an endeavour, we can look to the existing body of work which explores the motivations for this. For Jackson and Scott (2002: 107, 108), the absence of orgasm in a woman represents, for women themselves, failure, but crucially may also reflect on her partner's "flawed" technique. As a result, this may lead to women faking pleasure in order to satisfy their sexual partner's ego and to enhance men's feelings of sexual competency (Farvid and Bruan, 2006: 305). If women's bodies need to be worked on in order to produce orgasm, perhaps this reproduces the idea that female sexuality is passive, while male sexuality embodies expertise (Jackson and Scott, 2002: 107). To quote Jackson and Scott (2002; see also, Fahs, 2014; Fahs and Plante, 2017) then, in this space orgasm becomes a measurable, observable 'product' that women should strive to have and if this is the case, then the women I spoke to often faked orgasms in part because this 'product' is one which is always expected from sex. An absence of orgasm might then signify an incomplete sexual event, one which has not reached its proper conclusion, as arguably the orgasm is seen as the peak of heterosex (Potts, 2000; Jackson and Scott, 2002).

5.3 Pleasure as a Site of Inequality

As the discussion around women's orgasm progressed in my focus group sessions, it became clear that there was a particular type of pleasure-inequality in these women's accounts of heterosex with young men. This revelation began when Hannah quite openly explained the practical details of many of her own hook ups, declaring that: "In a lot of these hook ups the guy won't finger you [i.e., digitally penetrate] and won't eat you out [i.e., give oral sex]". At the same time that Hannah acknowledged how men rarely actively make an effort to sexually stimulate her in her hook ups, she also recognised that her role nevertheless was to be the giver of pleasure. She affirmed that she would always offer and give men oral sex, maintaining that she would "always give them a blow job". Hannah's disclosure was not atypical, rather it reflected a dynamic of hooking up and indeed many young women in my other focus groups communicated a similar sentiment. Piper disclosed a recurring hook up situation that followed the same gendered lines; the man as the receiver of pleasure and woman as the giver:

Piper: One of the people this last semester that I was hooking up with, I did not enjoy the sex like at all, but I liked him, so I kept going. He just did stuff that made it about himself, he just wanted to get to the point and like be done… Uhm, which, I mean it doesn't really bother me but is just kind of like, he never asked me what I liked or didn't like and I am a very open person about that stuff like during sexual encounters but he *(pauses and asks the other women)* how do I explain that?
Anna: He was selfish?
P: He was just very selfish with it and the two times I have been in a relationship it wasn't like that so I definitely think that just random hook ups do have a different side to it because I do think it is more about the guy and just getting to the point and being done –
Chiara: And what is the point?
Jen: To finish
A: To come to completion
P: Yeah

With the help of the other women, Piper openly admitted a pleasure-inequality of sorts as she concluded that the man whom she was hooking up with was "selfish" in that he never asked her what she would find sexually pleasurable. However, this passage seems to be double edged, in that at the same time that Piper identifies the man's selfishness, she also reveals her own trade

off in this particular hook up, explaining as she does that she: "didn't enjoy the sex at all but I liked him, so I kept going." This quote implies that the sex was endured, perhaps tolerated despite being unenjoyable. Piper reveals that she "liked" the man involved, suggesting perhaps a deeper emotional connection, possibly making the lacklustre sex worthwhile in an effort of self-interest. This leads me to wonder whether Piper felt that this disagreeable sex was temporary, that the sex with this man would eventually get better and thus she must wade through it in order to get to the to get to a place where her sexual desires would be recognised. Although the latter thought is my own conjecture, what is clear is that Piper also identified two interesting phenomena in the above passage. Firstly, she emphasises that in her previous relationships (which were more long-term and established than the fleeting hook up she is describing), sex was not so centred on male desire. This indicates that the heterosex that takes place in hook ups and the heterosex that exists in more committed relationships can sometimes take on different formats, with the latter, at times, being more equally pleasurable for both parties. Alternatively, in more long-term relationships, sex might just become a chore that is worth it and/or expected for various reasons, e.g., out of care for one's partner. This difference will be covered later on in the chapter, though it is important to note that, particularly given the feminist angle of this research, that long term coupling does not automatically equate to better sex. But, back to Piper's passage for now, herself and the other women began to also shape a discussion around the purpose of hook up sex. For example, Piper mentioned that she thought hooking up was "more about the guy and just getting to the point and being done." When I probed further what this "point" was, both Jen and Anna interjected that this meant the man coming to orgasm. Tessa astutely added to this and summarised how heterosex more generally is often structured:

Tessa: It is weird that sex is over when the guy finishes and not you. A guy finishes and normally thinks: 'Oh are you, is that good for you?' It's like that's it and you're kinda like: 'Alright!' Guys don't really like understand that like girls might be having sex for the same reason they do –

Anna: Yeah, we have needs too.

T: They think *[when]* girls have sex with someone it means they like them or want something more out of it, but with guys they're like: 'I just wanna have sex' and it is impossible for them to wrap their heads around *[the idea that]* girls might just have wanted to have sex that night.

From these passages we can argue that this pleasure inequality exists as heterosexual encounters are often shaped by and for men. This happens in such a way that the objective, the main aim of heterosex – as expressed quite evidently by the women here – is for the man to, as Jen says, "finish". Sex here is so male-centred that women's desires and pleasures are often overlooked and unconsidered. When Anna said, "we have needs too", she implied these needs are often not attended to and so we see here that heterosex follows gendered lines. Heterosex that the women are alluding to here arguably follows traditional discourses of assumed masculine and feminine heterosexual behaviour in that men are assumed to have a strong, active drive to seek sex, whereas women are viewed as more sexually submissive, responding to and putting their energies into men's desire and pleasure (Hollway, 1984; Armstrong, England and Fogarty, 2012: 77; Wade, 2015: 10).

Although it is not my intention to paint hooking up as wholly erroneous, existing as an inevitable detriment to *all* women, because it certainly is true that pleasure can be had (and is had) in hooking up, even though it is also a space whereby inequalities of pleasure sometimes live. (I will in fact be developing this thought in the subsequent sections of this chapter). But, it ought to be acknowledged that in the experience of the women involved in this study, the hook up can be one such place which reproduces and fosters gendered pleasure inequalities (Ostro, 2017: 7). There is a clear double standard of who is entitled to oral sex and who is expected to unselfishly deliver unreciprocated attention (I am reminded of Claire's disclosure for instance here). This structuring of heterosex illuminates how hook up spaces can and might perpetuate gender inequalities by implicitly denying women sexual pleasure while explicitly privileging and centring men (Ostro, 2017: 8).

5.4 Pleasure Complexities: Emotional Closeness and Men's Vulnerability

As I have discussed, there certainly is (at least for the women involved in this work), a discrepancy of pleasure experienced between heterosexual women and men, particularly in hook up scenarios. At times, the discussions I had with the young women did indeed follow the rhetoric that centred women's orgasm as the gold standard of sex. It was even considered "the promise land" by one woman at a point in the group discussions. But at other moments the conversations developed in such a way that decentralised the significance of the orgasm, so much so that their lack of orgasm was not reflected upon in such an adverse way. In fact, as I have previously mentioned, it is important we do not reductively insinuate that getting women

to the point of orgasm is the overall goal of heterosex. Likewise, nor should we associate a lack of a woman's orgasm with bad sex. To do both of these things would mean that their needs and/or desires are elided, and their experiences of pleasure are dismissed or made invisible. What I would like to highlight here is that heterosexual pleasure for the women involved in this study was acutely complex and nuanced, meaning different things for different women. For some, the lack of care and attention paid by men to their pleasure left them sexually dissatisfied, though for others this was not always the case. Thus, it is crucial that we let women themselves narrate the ways in which these experiences play out.

Nicole introduced this idea when she acknowledged that although she had never experienced an orgasm that didn't mean that she "doesn't like sex." Her admission encouraged the following exchange:

Nicole: It doesn't mean I don't like sex with my partner, I guess… And so, it is enjoyable with if you're like with a person that makes you, I dunno –
Lydia: It is like it brings me pleasure to bring him pleasure –
Group agrees
N: And so, when I was researching it, I was like, a lot of the research was all on google so it can only be *[pauses]*. It was a lot of like, some women just don't orgasm because for some women even if they orgasm it still wouldn't like be, like amazing, it varies from woman to woman how good an orgasm is because it is just like an action happening in your body… And so like, I got kind of comfort out of that because I was like: 'Am I dumb for enjoying sex without having an orgasm?' And it is not like I want to go on for years to try and make it happen, but I am, I am getting more enjoyment out of having our *[referring to her and her boyfriend]* little moment and it be done
Hannah: Oh, I will literally be like: 'I want to have sex so bad' but it's like I know I am not going to orgasm I just wanna make them *[men]* feel good, I wanna feel good-ish, want like to be like closely intimate –
N: Yeah
H: So, like, that's what I get out of it, not an orgasm

This exchange indicated to me that a heterosexual encounter did not need to offer the physical satisfaction in the form of orgasm for it to be inherently enjoyable. Rather, there was a strong emotional dimension to heterosexual satisfaction here. The women expressed finding

gratification in the sense of emotional closeness and togetherness with their partner that sex offered. Nicole described this desire for deep emotional connection as "having our little moment" and being "closely intimate." Meanwhile, and extending this further, both Lydia and Hannah (and the other women in the group who verbally agreed with their sentiment) introduced an additional element here, in that their pleasure derived from prioritising and providing pleasure to their own partners. Interestingly, when this discussion came to its natural end, one woman in the group, Laura, offered her own, highly astute analysis as to why Lydia, Hannah and some of the other women in the group, reportedly found such satisfaction in *bringing* pleasure as opposed to getting it. Laura's anecdote offered, in my opinion, quite a discerning analysis:

Laura: This may be… *[pauses in hesitation here]* I watched a show called 20th Century Woman and one of the characters is 17 and is talking to the lead character and the lead is like: "Wait so you have been having sex for a while, but you still haven't orgasmed?" And she's like: "No" and he's like: "Well why do you do it?" And she's like: "Well for other reasons, it's kind of like the only time that I see them (men) be vulnerable" and you know –

Group agrees

L: Sometimes guys can only be vulnerable in that position –

Group laughs and is in agreement, nodding

L: And it's like, you know, there's like a sense of power that you have over them because you are the one giving them that pleasure –

Group heavily agrees

L: Surely that is something too that it is almost like the one time where we have power? As women? Which you know –

Nicole: Yeah!

L: Like, I'd like that to change, I would like there to be more situations for me to have power than just in the bedroom –

Group laughs

L: But that being said, that is where our femininity, our womanhood can be superior to a man, like you can't come without me bitch!

Group laughs

I remember that in this moment the rest of the group were listening intently and murmuring in agreement with Laura. Her words clearly had quite an impact and I myself recall feeling that

this exchange was a quite a moment in the focus group, in that Laura seemed to get to the crux of why the act of being the providers of sexual pleasure was so consequential for the young women – that it provided them with a newfound sense of power. I suspect many qualitative researchers recognise the feeling I am describing; the sudden realisation that a research participant's particular story or self-disclosure was so evocative that it absolutely *must* be included in the writing up of the research. Laura's analysis was symbolic. Using a pop culture reference, she thoughtfully put the giving-pleasure-as-pleasurable phenomenon under the microscope so much so that she essentially *gave* me a reason as to why it exists in heterosex. And so, Laura identified that in the unequal and male dominated organisation that is heterosexual encounters (in her own view), the few times that women may experience superiority over men is in bringing them to orgasm. Laura's idea is echoed in Holland et al's (1998: 49) study, as they noted that for some men coming to orgasm was synonymous with losing control, being totally overtaken by sensation. As one man in their research put it: "when sex is really nice you do seem to lose your identity to some extent" (Holland, et al, 1998:49). To paraphrase Reynaud (1981: 36; see also, Plummer, 2003) then, for men the penis may be the symbol of power, but it is also, in fact one of the most fragile and vulnerable organs of their body. We can argue that the fragility and vulnerability Reynaud implies here is also produced and present in male orgasm, as Laura identifies. Arguably then, male orgasm can be seen as a process in which they are exposed, vulnerable and fragile.

It is important to pause for a moment and make note that the women's suggestions here might go against some of the earlier theorising around sex and gender covered in this thesis. What is inferred here is that men are vulnerable as a result of their sexual biology, insinuating that there are aspects of sex and gender which, according to the women involved in this thesis at least, are not a social construct. Crucially, what I understand the women to be doing here is using a narrative of biological reductionism as a strategy to claim power. This narrative (cultural in nature given it was influenced and inspired by a film) makes the claim that there is a biological basis for male vulnerability (in orgasm). In turn, a narrative of this kind perhaps offers a way for the women to claim pride as they develop a view that power relations shift, albeit briefly, during heterosex as a consequence of men's orgasm. We see for example, how Laura ends her thought process exclaiming "you can't come without me bitch!" In this, I understand Laura to be relying on the cultural narrative of male vulnerability as a result of orgasm to uphold a coherent self-narrative embedded in power and agency. Laura's language here is working to cope with the differences in power relations between young women and the men they have sex

with. If the young women's sexual desires and pleasures are frequently unattended to and if, overwhelmingly, the focus of heterosex is the sexual needs of men, young women may feel subordinated at times. In order to subvert this subordination then, they may well employ these cultural narrative/language methods as a way to evoke at a sense of pride or power. This narrative thus becomes important to the young women to preserve their sense of self and as a result, it does partly challenge some of the approaches to sex and gender taken by Butler (and other cultural feminists) which are considered in chapter three. However, as this cultural narrative and the language employed by the women is used in such a way as to maintain a subjective sense of self-efficacy, I take the view that it therefore does not create a *substantial* challenge to the sex/gender theory previously covered in this thesis.

Considering male heterosexuality then, it is certainly not any single shared experience, but rather, as is the case in Segal's (1997: 215) view, the site of any number of emotions of weakness and strength, pleasure and pain, anxiety, conflict and vulnerability. As Laura implied, in this act of women bringing men pleasure, the power shifts; men are somewhat exposed as they are in the act of having an orgasm, while women are in control, the *providers* of that orgasm. Further to this, if these young women consider the men they are having sex with to be generally well sexually informed, a woman who is sexually knowing herself, able to offer and deliver pleasure, threatens men's assumed sexual position of power (Holland, et al, 1998: 151). Although, this is not to say that women's efforts in providing and giving pleasure are always empowering. There certainly are gendered inequalities in this space that women experience, as I have touched upon and will explore in more detail later on. Though some of the narratives explored in this section of the chapter prioritise the emotional experience of sex over the physical (e.g., orgasm), this simultaneously occurs alongside women feeling a sense of pleasure as a consequence of pleasing others (Fahs and Plante, 2017: 38). The former can ultimately lead to sexual joy, and in the latter case, both joy and a sexual control of sorts can be experienced (of which Laura identified) (Fahs and Plante, 2017: 38).

5.5 Scenario Specific: Pleasure in Hook Ups vs Long Term Relationships

For the women involved in this research, the likelihood of them experiencing sexual pleasure was often dependent on the nature of their relationship. What I mean by this is that the women expressed that ongoing, committed relationships often led to more orgasms and general pleasure than the fleeting hook up. This was the case for a variety of reasons, namely because

more partner-specific learning (to the wants and needs of said partner) occurred in committed, long-term situations (Armstrong, England, Fogarty, 2012: 437). Piper expressed that long-term relationships were more caring in nature than hook up scenarios and this care, as she put it, extended to inquiring about one another's sexual "wants and needs". Jen developed this thought further, maintaining that the sex had with her boyfriend was different from sex with a hook up partner. She offered a reason for this difference, explaining that it is the familiarity present with a long-term partner – like a boyfriend - which meant that they, as she says: "know me and know my body." Jen declared that this knowledge offered a comforting and safe environment to have conversations about sexual likes and dislikes. In a short-lived hook up though, she explained she couldn't "have those same conversations".

Building on this, one woman, Sara revealed a hook up situation with a man that occurred more than once. She explained that their encounters consisted predominantly of foreplay and oral sex. Sara quite honestly admitted that neither of these acts were bringing her to orgasm, as she puts it she: "wasn't finishing". Despite this, she mentioned that she didn't make this known to the man involved as she "didn't feel comfortable enough" to do so. In the same focus group discussion, Hannah echoed Sara's admission, admitting during sex with "just some guy" (e.g., a hook up), instructing them to do certain things is difficult to navigate. Hannah explicitly said that it would make her uncomfortable to speak up and ask a male hook up partner to perform certain acts, in fact she was clear that doing this would be "too pushy". Nicole made a similar comparison between a previous, short-term dating scenario that lasted for a month, to her committed relationship with her current boyfriend. Nicole explained that in her previous relationship, her and her partner had sex only a few times over the course of a month. In that time, she said she "never would have said anything and never would have spoken up" about her sexual preferences as she did not "get to that place of comfort" required to vocalise her needs. Meanwhile, with her current boyfriend, things were different:

Nicole: I have been dating my boyfriend for like 6 months now so, now when we are having sex and he does something I don't like I say: 'No, stop do that different' or like, I am like: 'Let's do this'. I am very vocal with my opinion.

Nicole went on to summarise why the same comfort and confidence rarely exists in hook up encounters:

N: I think, especially when it comes to hook ups there is no way you can really get to that place of comfort because you may have just met this person you may have just decided to like get to this level with that person and so like for me, I don't think I would ever be like: 'Oh no I don't like the way that feels' or 'No let's not do that' or like you know, because it is just part of the speaking up to people that you are not that comfortable with.

Some women divulged examples of their male partners exhibiting this "caring" nature mentioned by Nicole above. For example, Lydia explained how her boyfriend had deliberately invested time in "literally doing research" as to how to make her orgasm. She found this act, as she said, to be: "very thoughtful" (it's worth mentioning that this disclosure ensued high admiration from the other women in the group, signalling perhaps the rarity of a male partner actively taking an interest in female pleasure). Sara revealed a similar experience as when she started having sex with a new boyfriend, he realised she was "not getting any pleasure out of it"?. Upon coming to this realisation, he too "did research" and sex became more pleasurable for her. What I found somewhat amusing here is that Lydia and Sara's admissions were disclosed as response to another woman in the group, Sophia, once she jokingly declared that in an effort to make heterosex more pleasurable she would gladly: "sit any guy down, spread my legs and say: 'this is the clit' like they just don't know where it is!" It seems that Lydia's and Sara's partners may have done exactly this, albeit with the help of an internet search engine.

As the discussions went on, women across this study regularly expressed the same sentiment, making the point that the familiarity of their long-term partner created a sense of comfort and safety for them, allowing them to feel confident in expressing their sexual wishes. Caring about and being attentive to women's pleasure, perhaps then comes with commitment. As we can see, in the more fleeting hook-up encounters, the unfamiliarity and the newness of the man these women were going to have sex with generated a sense of insecurity. As a result, the women here expressed feeling uncomfortable in voicing their opinions, or as one woman put it: "asking for things" during sex. What is implied here is that if men cared about them in a deeper sense, men would be more likely to want to please them and thus a conversation about what they want from sex opens up. Women then centre themselves differently during (hetero)sex according to the nature of the relationship they find themselves in.

Some women questioned the logic of the paradox in not expressing desires in hook up scenarios due to discomfort and doing so in long term relationships because the familiarity allows the

awkwardness to dissolve. Nicole expressed that the women should say: "do this harder, do this softer, do this different, be vocal," all because, as she quite plainly put it: "guys don't know shit." Hannah meanwhile illuminated the consequences caused by this lack of communication in hook ups. She shared that when giving oral sex to a man for the first time, she had to "ask for instructions". A few months passed after this happened and she began having ongoing, causal sex (e.g., an ongoing hook up scenario) with a different man. She had performed oral sex in this hook up multiple times when he quite suddenly revealed the following:

Hannah: He said, "Have I ever told you you're not very good at that?"
Group gasps and laughs
H: And I was like, I packed up myself and walked myself *[out of there]* –
Group laughs
H: This was a guy that I had been hooking up with consistently and *[pauses]*.. I was mad! And I later told him, I was like: "Why the fuck would you say that?" like: "You could have just told me what to do better" … Just… *[mumbles and struggles to find the words]*
Chiara: Less blunt?
Hannah: Yeah, less blunt and just tell me what you like and that doesn't even imply you don't like other things, I will just be more frequent with *[them]*, you know what I mean?

Hannah's feelings were quite obviously hurt as a result of this encounter and the other women in the group were visibly and audibly shocked at her hook up partner's actions. Interestingly though, Tessa, in another group, offered a novel reflection as to why this absence of communication exists. She suggested that hook up encounters may involve little discussion around women's desires (than in long term relationships) due to men's embarrassment. She explained that:

Tessa: I think deep down guys are kind of embarrassed that girls didn't get the full thing from what they enjoyed [sex], you know? Because saying: 'Do you need me to do anything else?' Is admitting the fact they didn't do enough to begin with.

As this research is limited to women, I cannot make broad generalisations as to whether Tessa's statement about men is true; doing this would be beyond the scope of this project. However, she certainly offers a thoughtful analysis, implying men behave blissfully ignorant to women's pleasure in heterosexual hook ups to avoid exposing their sheer cluelessness. On the other hand,

Jen was certain that women's inability to speak up in hook ups originates from their sexual education. A space where women, she said, are taught that feeling pleasure is "a bad thing". Jen and some of the other women went on to discuss that:

Jen: We are taught to feel guilty even though we may be enjoying it or may not be enjoying it, we feel guilty sharing what we want because then it's like –
Anna: It almost makes you feel slutty to like *[ask what for what you want]* -
J: Yeah!
Group agrees
J: To say what you want; you don't want your boy to be like: 'Oh how do you know that you like that?' You don't want to be questioned in that way -
Tara: I dunno why
J: It is just an uncomfortable situation

Jen's last sentence here is loaded as it implies quite an antiquated thought: that women will be shamed, questioned and chastised for simply *knowing* what they do and don't enjoy sexually. To know and explore your own body, to discover and articulate your own sexual desires is thus suspect, as she said: "you don't want to be questioned in that way". Women also implied a double bind here. Jen's revelation encouraged Claire to explain that she often considers herself to be "submissive" during sex, which resulted in the following conversation:

Piper: I do think the word Claire uses is good, like submissive. I definitely think that's how we always feel during sex with guys especially with random hook ups, I think with relationships it is a little bit different but definitely with one night stands or even, like a random consistent hook up, you feel like it is about the guy and what he wants and I don't know why that is but it is just definitely something that –
Tessa: We don't necessarily even agree with it but -
Jen: You have been like kinda, like groomed to do that, you think that is the right thing to do and your kind of job as a woman to make him feel good and kind of put yourself on the back burner which is so messed up, it is so messed up but -
T: It is almost like we feel, like pressured almost, like if we don't make them *[men]* feel good they're going to think that I am weird.

Although I intend to analyse this passage and others similar in more detail later on in following chapter, it is clear here that despite having to appear innocent and virtuous, these women report a heavy onus on them to know *how* to provide men with sexual pleasure and to do so without question. And as we have seen, when they offer this pleasure successfully, they feel pleasure themselves. To echo Pearson (2018; see also, Livingston et al, 2013) women must monitor themselves; abstaining, resisting, complying, seducing and performing all in an effort to avoid labels like "slut" that Anna mentioned. They must be sexy and desirable, but not sexual or desiring. As a result, this restricting behaviour prevents women from exploring their own feelings and desires (Pearson, 2018: 1470; Bay-Cheng, 2015, 281). Women need to be desirable but not desiring, sexually responsive but also a gatekeeper of their own sexuality (Bay Cheng, 2015: 281). As Gavey (2005; see also, Bay-Cheng, 2015) notes, women's sexuality is framed in terms of their responses to the men's sexual interests, the latter of which are presumed to be urgent and relentless. The rules and regulations of what a woman should or should not do in the hook up space thus left the young women in this research treading a careful line in how they navigate their sexual behaviours to ensure they live up to the normalised expectations of the 'correct' way to be as a heterosexual woman (Ostro, 2017: 9).

5.6 Women's Claims to Sexual Power

To begin this final section, I would like to agree with Holland, Ramanzanoglu and Thomson (1996: 146), that the women I spoke to were not simply the "victims of heterosexuality." Indeed, there were moments in which the women expressed having a strong sense heterosexual power and agency. Here the women communicated the ways in which they could choose to engage in casual sexual behaviours without negative consequences (Kalish and Kimmel, 2011). I want to consider then, how these sexual choices were often reflected upon as empowering and liberating features of their sexual lives. Following on from this, I'd like to acknowledge and draw attention to the idea that although there were examples of a sort of liberation *from* male desire that the women reported, often this empowerment did indeed have roots in male approval and attention. We see this particularly as the women involved in this thesis quite clearly expressed feeling a sense of gratification as a consequence of receiving male attention. Taking this further, the satisfaction which emerged from attention of this kind seemed sometimes to give way to a dutiful need to provide men with sexual pleasure. I saw this as a heterosexual transaction in a way; a consequence of male attention was a (good) sexual encounter or experience, provided to men by the woman.

I will say that at this point that it may indeed seem that there are many social and sexual paradoxes to be explored here. The young women felt empowered and sometimes this empowerment was entirely connected to their own sexual desires, while in other conversations this empowerment had obvious foundations in male approval. Regarding the latter, to some it may well be the case that liberation or empowerment tied to male attention and approval is not liberation or empowerment at all. I disagree, though admittedly, at times I found it increasingly hard to grapple with these young women's claims of sexual empowerment. I think it is worth mentioning here then, that I want to distance myself from the school of thought that either all heterosexual women are victims of a male-dominated sexuality or they are overwhelmingly carefree and sex-positive. This is not a question of binaries and a view such as this does not represent the reality of women's heterosexual lives. Rather, women seemed to be suggesting moments in which power was mediated and agency carved out, while traditional discourses and norms of heterosexual behaviour were resisted. I cover these few points in greater detail in the following chapter but with this in mind, I hope the women's accounts speak for themselves here. There may indeed seem to be contradictions in their accounts but perhaps these are simply part of young women's heterosexual worlds. With this in mind, the following and final section of this chapter will present an analysis divided into two parts: first, of the ways in which sexual encounters were positive and powerful for the women, and secondly, concluding by examining the significance of male attention for the women I spoke to and the consequences and responsibilities this attention creates.

Discussions around sex positivity in the focus group sessions evolved as I began to ask how empowered the women felt in their sexual encounters. Across all of the group sessions, there were women who disclosed a sense of freedom and confidence in having and expressing their sexual desires. At first, these conversations were quite clear in that such positive sexual discourses were not connected to the young women seeking male approval. Rather they were associated with what the young women *themselves* found to be sexually pleasing. Sophia and Hannah communicated this sentiment early on in our focus group session, noting how there had been a change in the last few years as to how their friendship group viewed heterosex:

Sophia: I feel like within the last 2 years, since this age group have become sexually active *[things have changed],* like you see statuses on social media like 'I have a dick appointment'

The women agree

Sophia: It is like: 'I am doing this!' And I also saw a thing *[on social media]* that said; 'Don't say you fucked me If I didn't finish, I fucked you' and it is more like, if I told Hannah or someone *[that]* I slept with someone last night she is like rooting me on instead of –
Hannah: I would be like: 'Omg tell me everything, you go girl'

Sophia and Hannah - and the majority of the other women in the group who agreed with them – contested the image that we have seen thus far of women's heterosexuality as passive, unable to enjoy corporeal pleasures (Allen, 2003: 222). Interestingly, messages on social media held some weight here in that they reinforced and legitimised women's sexual desires as normal and identified their positionality as being active and desiring heterosexual agents (Allen, 2003: 220, 222). In the same focus group, Lydia also identified with this idea having a strong sense of sexual agency:

Lydia: I didn't really get a lot of male attention in high school because I was very involved in dance so I was always surrounded by women so when I got into college and like started going to parties and stuff, I would get more attention from guys. I had only been kissed once in high school and once I was going to parties in college I was like, I did it all for myself, but I just wanted to experiment and find out what I liked and could create like, what I wanted in a guy so I could actually be happy in a relationship so that's what started the like sexually experimenting in college
Chiara: Did you feel empowered by being able to experiment?
L: I think I did, I like, 'cause, I enjoyed being able to like kiss somebody and be like, 'I did not like that', and being able to go and maybe find somebody else that I actually did enjoy being with, so it was definitely empowering being able to pick and choose what I wanted and what satisfied me

Lydia openly expressed her desires and the ease in which she acted on these feelings entirely of her own volition. She reflexively engaged with this strategy as a way to develop herself. Though Lydia mentions that male attention was a rare occurrence for her during high school and was far more commonplace during her time in college, her decision to have sex and/or to sexually experiment during the latter period was not related to this new-found male attention. Instead, Lydia quite clearly embarked upon sexual experimentation satisfyingly, and in her own self-interest, mentioning how she found enjoyment in being able to deduce was sexually pleasing to her and what she "could create" as she says, in a sexually expressive sense.

Meanwhile, in a separate discussion, Vanessa began to reflect upon her own sexual choices in a more nuanced way. At first, she illuminated the limitations and confines of a casual hook up scenario, though she went on to detail how she began to transform this and revealed a newfound sense of empowerment as a result:

Vanessa: Uhm so, when I first came to college, I had just broken up with my high school boyfriend, so I was a little, I was excited to meet new people and seek that attention and hook up with other people. Uhm so I like, I would enjoy it and I did, I hooked up a lot for the first two years of college before I met my current boyfriend. Uhm… But yeah, most of the time it wasn't like anything great! Like I would love going out, Thursday, Friday, Saturday because I would text the boys I was hooking up with and meet up with them later but thinking back on it now it wasn't anything special and there were situations where maybe I could have said my wants or what I wanted during the hook up and I just didn't because like, I dunno. I just didn't but yeah, I probably should have and actually I think, later, near the end of my hook up time period in college I did start voicing what I wanted, uhm and yeah it got better. For example, one boy I was hooking up with, he lived, like when I lived in the sorority house, we are all in the same sorority, he lived two blocks down and he would call me only at like 3am but like I really liked him he was super cute, whatever

Group Laughs

V: So, like whenever we would both go out he would call me late and he would be like: 'oh come over' and I would go over, I would walk there at like 3AM -

Rebecca: Yep

Beth: Always

V: And then just like sleep there and walk home in the morning, like whatever but then I was like: 'This is kinda shitty and I don't wanna do this anymore, like what am I doing'. So I was like, I still wanted to hook up with him, so I was like: 'OK you can pick me up and drive me home in the morning and wear a condom' and eventually it worked and it was fine and I was like: 'Wow maybe I can say things that I want and have it work!' Yeah, I mean probably should have been doing that the whole time! Yeah.

Chiara: But did you find it difficult to do that?

V: Yeah, I did, I did for sure.

Vanessa recognised that the circumstances of her ongoing hook up scenario was unfulfilling. She then developed an approach to transform her situation with her causal partner to one that was more enjoyable for her. This involved shifting the balance of power so that it was not so male-oriented, giving Vanessa the ability to assert her own preferences. She expressed contentment and liberation in doing this, although we ought not diminish the struggle Vanessa may have experienced in getting to this point. She was somewhat unclear on this, apart from admitting: "Yeah I did, I did for sure" as to how difficult creating this change was for her, making this an opaque point that I can only develop to a limited extent. Nevertheless, Vanessa's actions (and the actions of all the women described in this section) - as Meenagh notes - produced a variation on the norm of young women making themselves sexually available *for* men by instead making themselves able to choose to be sexually available if they so desired (Meenagh, 2017: 456). It is important not to be dismissive of that and instead I want to give space in this thesis to the young women's specific stories here as they show that there is an area within casual heterosexual hook ups whereby young women can and do experiment positively with sexual intimacy and the women's experiences in this section attest to that.

5.6.1 Pleasure in Male Attention

At this point we ought to reflect that these constructions of sexual agency are somewhat at odds with some of the young women's disclosures of pleasure and sexual inequality discussed early on in this chapter. I think here it may be the case that two conflicting things are true at the same time. What I mean is, that the choice in hooking up is one freely made by the young women I spoke to and that choice is an empowering one. By extension, so is the sex they are having in these spaces as it affords them the ability to, at times, explore and experiment. It also may be one thing (in the words of Sophia) to announce on social media that in not being brought to orgasm, a woman fucked a man rather than the other way around. But it may be another situation entirely to make this lack of orgasm explicitly known to the man (or men) these young women are having sex with. So, when the women get into the hook up space, when the hook up begins, the inequalities of pleasure are *sometimes* exposed.

However, I want to be clear that it is not my intention to argue or assume that all heterosexual encounters are inherently unequal. As we have seen above, the young women I spoke to were indeed sexually empowered at times. Though, with this in mind, it must also be made clear that all of the women involved in this study were heterosexual, young, the majority of them white, with a social group that were clearly highly supportive of their sexual choices.

Circumstances such as these then may have afforded these women a certain social privilege, offering them the ability to construct themselves and their sexual experiences through narratives of agency and choice (Meenagh, 2017: 450). More complexly still, it may well be the case that middle class women, such as the ones interviewed in this thesis, might talk more in these terms, while still being constrained in their actual sexual practice in terms of purity and shame – particularly as Rebecca goes on to describe below (see Skeggs, 2011 for a discussion on middle class women's tendency to criticise the sexualities of working-class women). Thus, it is important to consider the contextual factors of these young women's lives when examining their sexual agency. As Meenagh (2017: 450) puts it, in doing so we avoid separating out moments of sexual agency from the larger context of young women's lives. We also avoid the danger associated with this, of failing to critically analyse *which* women can claim empowerment and agency. As it has been noted in both the methodology and literature review chapters of this thesis, experiences differ greatly across social, cultural and historical location. Therefore, these factors, and the ways in which they intersect, must always be borne in mind to consider how opportunities to access power and agency are offered to *some* women, but not *all* women.

So, the young women in this study did, at times, consider themselves to be free sexual agents, enjoying the sex they had and promoting themselves as sexual beings. They were not powerless victims of a male-dominated heterosexuality. Perhaps though, this is a consequence of the material resources available to the women I spoke with. For example, given the context of the data produced, I was interviewing young women at a specific time in their lives - they were young undergraduates at the time. With this in mind then, it is a possibility that their context afforded them the opportunity to experiment with hooking up and the less stable sexual relationships. Later on in their life, the women may be able to move on to the more committed relationship, whereby they 'settle down', this gives them the privilege and latitude to take time out from this. With this being said, there were moments of contradiction where at times their sexual empowerment seemed to be caught up in various complexities which I will now reflect upon, thinking particularly about the benefits of male attention.

Hannah brought this topic up quite early on in our focus group session, explaining as Laura had above, that male attention increased for her personally during her time in college. Getting noticed by men was novel for her and in fact, Hannah explained that once it began happening, she craved it in a way, as she stated: "I was like: 'Ok now I want more". Hannah went on to explain the significance of pleasure derived from getting male attention by disputing a point

made by Nicole in the group. This happened when Nicole disclosed that she would prefer to pleasure herself through masturbation than have sex with a man who she knew wouldn't take the necessary steps to bring her sexual enjoyment. Hannah contested Nicole's point, declaring that:

Hannah: I have a different preference, she [Nicole] said sometimes she would prefer to masturbate [than have sex with men because that sex is unenjoyable] and I don't think I would give up male attention to just… masturbate.

It became clear at this point that male attention and the pleasure which came as a consequence of it was of value to some of the young women involved in this research. Indeed, this phenomenon was echoed in other conversations that I had with young women. Rebecca for example, explained that a past eating disorder during her high school years led her to feeling a significant sense of negative self-image. As a consequence of her eating disorder, she revealed that she had weekly visits with a dietician and therapist and had relapsed multiple times. After disclosing this she shared the following with the group:

Rebecca: Going out, getting recognised and being chosen by a guy, uhm is… Feels like a drug for me. Uhm, to be honest I have slept with 42 people in my lifetime and I am only 21, so like, that is hard to kinda bite sometimes, especially you… There is a lot of stigma… with all of that
Chiara: Why's that?
R: I don't wanna be that slut, that easy girl, all of those things and, I mean I guess it is just kinda hard. But to me that was almost like a drug, I just felt chosen and like wanted and like I got, like I was picked, uhm, I felt like: 'Wow! Maybe there is something to me! Heck I am getting attention that is amazing!' And so, I went with it and I didn't care, it was something that made me happy and I was like: 'Maybe this is a way I should be ok with dressing myself and stuff like this and going out and having fun.'

Rebecca was emboldened here, she implied a sense of euphoria as a result of her receiving male sexual attention, using loaded vocabulary in comparing it to a drug of some kind. Further to this, her being, as she says, "picked or chosen" gave her newfound validation and self-confidence that an eating disorder had perhaps deprived her of in a way. It almost seemed that receiving male attention offered Rebecca a way to cope; attention from men alleviated the feelings of negative self-worth that she mentioned. Rebecca summarised this quite poignantly

when she shared that through this process she was being touched by men and "no one was making gross faces." Though at the same time, we can observe how she grappled with some of the consequences of acting upon this male attention. Rebecca disclosed that despite being young, she felt she had slept with a considerable number of men and had difficulty in coming to terms with this, explaining that this was "hard to bite". She thus struggled with shame and stigma associated with this and wanted to distance herself from derogatory labels, as she said: "I don't wanna be that slut, that easy girl". Perhaps these feelings came about from the double standards and mixed messages young women still receive concerning their sexual reputations (I will explore this further in the subsequent chapter). Nevertheless, this struck me as a fleeting worry, as she went on to further detail what it felt like for her to be "chosen":

Rebecca: For that night they [men] picked you and so it makes me feel good about myself, so I kind of feel like it is kind of like my duty, to make them feel good that night

It seemed that pleasure for Rebecca was derived entirely from being wanted by men sexually, so much so that when it came to sex, her partner's desires were her complete responsibility. Using the words, as other women interviewed for this thesis have done, 'duty' and 'picked', Rebecca pointed to a sense of passivity. The desires and pleasures of her partner were paramount to those of her own. Rebecca's proclaimed pleasure here seemed circular as the advantage she gained, the pleasure gained, was in relation to men's affirmation of her appearance. I probed Rebecca further as I wondered where her own sexual pleasures fit within these scenarios; would, for example, voicing her own sexual wants be detrimental?

Rebecca: It could be not what they [men] want and so like it is kinda my job… I felt like it was my job to like listen to them or maybe do what they wanted, like they had already given me what I had wanted to feel special –
Chiara: That affirmation that you were picked?
R: Yeah

At this point in the session, another woman in the group, Terri, attested to Rebecca's view:

Terri: There's so many people here [at college] and I feel like… I do consider myself attractive but there are women out there that are more attractive than me
[Rebecca agreed with this statement at this point]

T: It is just a fact, there are people out there that are more unattractive, but to be the one that is chosen out of a sea of women you know, you just feel special
Chiara: So, you feel like you owe them *[men]* something?
T: Yeah, I dunno, yeah, I guess.

In the same group session, Vanessa went on to give further reasoning as to why she did not, or could not, prioritise her own sexual pleasure in these encounters with men. She explained that she wanted to be seen as "always desirable" by the men she was having sex with. It was important to her to be a woman who could provide both a fun time and be there for men to have sex with. Making her sexual needs known to her sexual partners would be detrimental as it could potentially risk the identity of the "cool girl", as she referred to it, that she had created and embodied.

The young women who spoke to me here felt a sense of satisfaction and pleasure which derived from young men affording them sexual attention. The women were being active in that they were making the choice to respond to, and seek out, this attention and thus we can suggest that perhaps that these women felt a sense of power from being needed or wanted by men. This in turn begs the question as to whether the power to perform sexual desire in this way is in fact a form of sexual empowerment? I would argue, given what the young women explained to me, that it is. At the same time though, it ought to be acknowledged that the women were predominantly satisfying the needs of men in these encounters. In fact, I was struck by the extent to which these young women saw it as their duty to take care of their male partners during these sexual interactions and to even at times, mould themselves to perform an identity – as Vanessa did for example – in an attempt to be more palatable to men. As we have seen in other sections of this chapter, the sexual wants and needs of men took precedence in these sexual scenarios. It may well be sexually pleasing to be the desirable women, but it is important to remember that the desirable woman takes on the responsibility, in this case, of giving men pleasure, thus ignoring her own. Perhaps this is simply an example of reciprocity for the attention received and after all to be wanted, to be chosen by men was at times sufficient for these women to feel, as they say "special". Sex took on an instrumental meaning for many of the women here in that at times it became a tool used to find self-assurance. There was clearly a dependence on male approval and attention, but I didn't interpret this to be inherently negative. Rather, the women I spoke to were proactive, they are well aware of their attractiveness to men and they were at times using this to their own advantage. So, a

complicated picture emerged of women who could and did find power in their strong heterosexual identity, while also encountering clear gendered inequalities and biases of how women should act along the way.

5.7 Conclusion

Through looking at the women's accounts in this chapter of the thesis, it is possible to make the claim that women experience considerable inequality with regards to their own sexual pleasure. Many report the frequent faking of orgasms, while others explain how causal hook-up scenarios are often centred upon the desires and pleasures of men. The young women also speak to the conditions in which pleasure is complex. There is a resistance of sorts in their accounts here in that the women acknowledge that, in the situation of providing men with pleasure and bringing them to orgasm, men are the vulnerable subject, if only briefly. Additionally, sex can be seen as an instrument for some of the women in this thesis to find self-assurance and confidence. The question becomes then, whether these acts constitute sexual power and agency, or whether they are circular examples of young women 'wanting to be wanted' and thus examples of objectification. These questions will be analysed in the penultimate chapter, chapter seven, of this thesis, in considering whether and how feminine sexiness and desirability can be respected notwithstanding the wider environment of gendered and sexualised inequality.

Chapter Six – Women Speaking to the Dangers in Heterosex

6.1 Introduction

In the chapter that follows, there are a range of topics to be analysed and though they may seem somewhat separate as subject matters, they all in fact speak to the various concerns that the young women reported having to contend with as part of their heterosexual lives. I chose to structure the findings chapters along these lines, focusing first on the constructions of pleasure and empowerment and now moving to a concentration of the risks and concerns in women's experiences of heterosex, as practically, it made the most sense. What I mean is that when split, these two topics of pleasure and empowerment, risks and anxieties, juxtapose one another as separate sections quite neatly. At the same time though, the two do complexly intertwine with one another if we consider that pleasure can operate alongside danger – this concept is one which I will tease out in more detail in the penultimate discussion chapter of this thesis, linking the findings to consider the nuanced picture of women's heterosexual lives.

All of the conversations that developed in this section came about quite spontaneously from several different questions that I put to the women, ranging from asking about their early sexual education to considering their conceptualisations of sexual consent. Consequently, this chapter first attempts to analyse dialogues which detailed physical pain during sexual intercourse and the difficulty related to discussing this pain with sexual partners. From this, discussions around sexual shaming are examined, paying particular attention to the role of the young women's sexual histories here. As part of this, I focus on vocabularies used to discuss women's sexual pasts. These vocabularies illuminated a sexual double standard that the women reported having to contend with. Later in the chapter I explore the women's accounts of practicing safe sex, focusing specifically on men's aversions to condom use. Indeed, as these discussions around sexual health and methods of practicing safe sex progressed, the women shared their own experiences of a specific sexual harm in relation to condom use, in particular of non-consensual condom removal. Often referred to in the academic literature as 'stealthing' (Brodsky, 2017), this was an act – in some jurisdictions non-consensual condom removal has been prosecuted as sexual assault (see the Canadian case R v Hutchinson, 2014, SCC 19 as well as the reporting on the Julian Assange case, Assange v Swedish Prosecution Authority [2011] EWHC 2849 (Reuters, 2017; CNN, 2017) - which seemed to have been experienced by many young women

whom I spoke to. I attempt to highlight their stories detailing episodes of non-consensual condom removal in the penultimate section of this chapter. The concluding part of this chapter attempts to draw together all of the anxieties and fears which the women spoke of and thus involves developing narratives around safety and mitigating risk, as well as the women's associated strategies and methods to do this. I attempt to elucidate a particular phenomenon here involving women engaging in a form of *self-work* in unpleasant scenarios in order to manage their own emotions as well as men's, in an effort to preserve their sexual safety.

6.2 Experiences of Physical Pain

Paradoxically, alongside discussions of pleasure which featured in the previous chapter, pain during heterosex was reflected upon in some detail, particularly with one group of women involved in this research. Across this group, the women disclosed that physical pain was a frequent occurrence during sexual encounters. The experience of pain came up after the young women had discussed what they did and did not find pleasurable during their sexual encounters. I was struck by them sharing that they often felt unable to tell their sexual partner about said pain. Claire began the discussion of pain during sex, revealing the following to the group:

Claire: A problem I have is like, is sometimes it genuinely hurts me, and I have had experiences where I am just like, literally this hurts so badly I cannot, I am not even enjoying myself

Although I chose not to probe Claire to explain further the type of pain she had experienced, the rest of the women recognised and subsequently agreed with Claire's portrayal. Once she had divulged this, the conversation evolved, with Claire explaining that she felt she couldn't explicitly communicate this pain to her partner:

Claire: I don't wanna like… I just have gotten up [during painful sex] and been like: 'Bye, I have to go", like: 'My roommate needs me or something'… Uhm and I think they [men] don't get that, that like, I don't know –
T: Like, we have to make up excuses for it
C: Yeah

T: Instead of saying: 'This is uncomfortable I want to stop' we have to be like: 'Oh my friend is in danger', you know?

Group agrees

T: Like we have to make up some elaborate lie just to have like, a normal conversation -

Jen: And I think like even now, kind of what you [gesturing to Claire] were saying about being, the whole in pain, even being a relationship, now even if it hurts me I say, like: 'Oh that that hurts, uhm, sorry'

T: But like sorry -

J: Yeah

Anna: You, like, apologise for it

In this passage, the women exposed not only a discomfort during sex, but also a discomfort in voicing this pain to whomever it was they were having sex with. Instead, they resorted to making up excuses in order to put a stop to the painful sex that they are having, often apologising in the process and taking responsibility for both the pain and the ending of the sexual encounter. Perhaps the women used this strategy as they felt concerned that their pain would not be taken seriously enough by their partner if revealed. Although not evident in the quotes explored thus far, there was a possibility (conveyed in the conversations that are explored in the following sections of this chapter) that men would continue with sex or encourage them to tolerate the pain. This point also echos some of the comments made in the previous chapter, in that if women seem to be concentrating on men's pleasure (in line with traditional discourses of male heterosexuality, if men's arousal must be followed through with, as their sexual wants are so biologically uncontrollable) then it becomes impossible for women to put a stop to sex even because of their own pain. Thus, men's pleasure is over-attended to, to the detriment of the women's own comfort. In fact, Jen shared an instance during intercourse with her boyfriend that became painful and during this scenario, she conveyed her discomfort to him. In her own words, Jen revealed that upon doing this, her boyfriend replied: "I am sorry, but let's keep trying and see if it is gonna be ok". She ruminated as to why he reacted in that way:

Jen: Like, no we have tried long enough! I dunno, I feel like boys get in the zone where they need to do this [e.g., have sex] and they forget that you are a human being and need to be treated as such and they can't separate those two brains in being animalistic, that's sounds kinda gross, but that animalistic brain vs their human emotion.

Mirrored in in Jen's characterisation of men's "two brains" is perhaps the trope, the narrative, that men are somehow entitled to act on their sexual urges as these are powerful and insatiable. Also implied in Jen's statement is a sense of male sexual entitlement; she explained that men "get in the zone where they need to do this." Can it be inferred from her point that at times young men expect sexual intercourse from women as their interests and preferences are prioritised over those of their partners? Perhaps by extension of this, they may feel a right to apply subtle pressure to get it, a subtle pressure which is echoed in her boyfriend's pseudo-reassurance: "I am sorry but, let's keep trying and see if it is gonna be ok". In fact, an iteration of Jen's identification that men are unable to separate their "two brains" (animalistic and human in her case), can be found in existing academic literature. For example, in Miles' (1993: 501) study, participants associated the male sex drive with irrationality, as men, in their own words, "don't think practically" when aroused. Similarly, one women in Holland, Ramazanoglu and Thomson's (1996: 246; see also, Vitellone, 2000: 158) research commented, "I mean, a boy, he's meant to be sort of dominant, 'I want sex', you know, a cave-man type of thing." So, it seems that while men are perceived as unable to exercise a sense of self control during sex, to an extent some of women in this research were in practice unable to exercise any control of their own physical comfort. The women I spoke to assumed that feeling discomfort during sex was not an adequate or respected reason for putting a stop to sexual encounters. They implied that abruptly ending heterosex would possibly go against the innate, uncontrollable male heterosexuality that, arguably, once provoked must be satiated.

Intriguingly, when the discussion around physical pain during sex came to a close with one group of women, Tessa ruminated as to what heterosex would look like if it was commonplace for men to feel physical pain as opposed to women. She exclaimed: "Imagine if it hurt for a guy!" To which the other women in the group offered up this somewhat saddening exchange to conclude the conversation:

Claire: Yeah!
Anna: They'd immediately stop and be like: "I need to go home"
T: Like: "Ow! Make 'em stop", you know?
Chiara: But you are meant to be passive and not say anything?
Group agrees
Jen: Just put up with it and they kind of think "Oh if I keep going she will just put up with it and give up"

T: Or it will get better
J: Yeah or it will get better

6.3 Sexual Histories and Shaming

Not only did a picture of physical (sexual) concerns emerge from my conversations with women but so too did more emotional concerns. Particularly, there were specific apprehensions that were bound with the young women's own previous sexual histories and experiences. The women I spoke to explained how they had experienced, at times, punitive consequences as a result of having casual, hook up sex. Some of these ideas cropped up in the previous chapter, though I did not analyse them in quite so much detail and thus will attempt to do so here. I intend to focus in this section on the specific talk and vocabulary that was associated with shaming women for their sexual experience, vocabulary like slut and whore for example. I go on to touch on the double-standards of this sexual shaming, exploring how men seem to be exempt from such talk. Later, this section considers the connotations of these words and the implications they had for the young women.

These conclusions were drawn predominantly from one group of women and in fact came about when I asked the group whether they could clarify to me the meaning of the term "body count". I was introduced to this phrase by one group of fraternity men whom I spoke to early on in my research. It was used during a conversation whereby a young man was describing the vocabulary he and his friends would use when discussing how many women they had slept with (e.g., "what is your body count?"). It was grim and objectifying, turn of phrase that, to me, seemed to be synonymous with men glorifying their sexual experience; the higher the body count they had, the better. So, I wondered then if this phenomenon was the same for the young women:

Chiara: Uhm, I remember talking to some guys and they were talking about how they talk about the amount of people they have slept with and they call it –
Claire: Their body count?

Claire and the rest of the women were familiar with the term and I probed whether they used the same language and would thus have similar conversations detailing their sexual exploits:

Anna: I mean I think like we talk about how many people we have had sex with but I don't know if we are talking about it in the same connotation as they do, I dunno if we are bragging like: "Oh I have had sex with this many people"

After Anna implied there was a gendered difference here in the ways of speaking about the number of sexual partners, Tara and Piper in in the group went on to detail why this was the case:

Tara: Oh, girls definitely want it to be lesser than more
Group agrees
Piper: People like get worried when like: "Oh no my body count is reaching near double digits; I can't let it reach double digits"
Chiara: Why is that?
P: I dunno, even though you might not be telling other people your body count but like internally you think like: "Oh a slut or a whore would have double digits, I don't want to label myself that way"

As was the case in the previous chapter (I am thinking of Rebecca's story here wherein she describes having had multiple sexual partners despite her young age), having a high body count (high being near the "double digits" as Piper explained) would teeter close to shaming territory, carrying derogatory descriptions like, as Piper said: slut or whore. Piper implied these labels were assigned by others, explaining that she didn't want to label *herself* that way. This seemed to be a contrast to Claire's experience, whose story below in fact hinted at ways that these labels are ascribed by others and *then* internalised.

Claire: I just have experience of this and my roommate's boyfriend and his roommate… So, he goes to a different school and he hears about everything that goes on because me and my roommate are best friends. The other night we were FaceTiming them [both her roommate's boyfriend and his roommate] and he was like: "Claire what's your body count?" and he was like: "it has gotta be double digits, like it has gotta be double digits!" They were being kinda mean and I was just like: "I am not talking about this", and my roommate is actually in double digits, but she doesn't like talk about it because she is with him now. They were like saying fifteen people and to me, that is totally fine if you are cool with that but to me, it was just kind of rude that they would assume that meanwhile I know he [her roommate's boyfriend] has had

sex with a lot of girls too and especially his roommate who always has a new girl in his room every single night […] But yeah, they think it is like really bad for a girl to have sex with more than like 5 people

I was struck here by how brazen the shaming was of Claire, particularly as she explained the hypocrisy in that the young men humiliating her had themselves experienced active sexual pasts involving several women. In sharing this she implied a double standard in that the sexual labels - and embarrassment which accompanies them - as pointed out by Piper are often used to malign women only. Claire went on to imply that the accusations she faced here were problematic because of their inaccuracy, perhaps she did this as a way to manage the stigma she was facing. However, she revealed that her own roommate was in fact in the "double digits" though she pointed out that her roommate "doesn't talk about it" as she now in a committed relationship by happenstance with the man who was shaming Claire over FaceTime. To me, it seemed she was suggesting her friend – because of the "double digits" situation - would be a more appropriate target for the young men's criticism, deflecting the humiliation away from herself in the process. Further to this, though I suspect it is not entirely unusual for partners to leave their past sexual histories as a topic unexplored, I did wonder at the time if Claire's roommate would have experienced the same shaming from her own boyfriend had he known that his partner's "body count" was, by his own estimation, a high one.. She mentioned how men think it is, in her own words, "really bad for a girl to have sex with five people", to which Jen noticed a contradiction:

Jen: But then they [men] expect us to be incredibly experienced when we are with them!

At this point the group laughed and agreed with Jen and it seemed the women were grappling with the same conflict seen in the previous chapter. On the one hand, women are expected to know what men enjoy sexually and thus be the providers of pleasure but the question remained; how is it possible to gain sexual knowledge when women face shame for being sexually experienced? The mixed messages conveyed the following sentiment: have sex, but be careful, don't have too much, all in an effort for the women to distance themselves from what Rebecca identified in the previous chapter as being "that easy girl". The conflicts then, were between being sexually inexperienced - thus considered as pure – but to know how to sexually please men. At the same time, to show such sexual experience, and to show such experience in a way that would be recognisable to the men they were having sex with, would mean being marked

as sexually immodest and easy. I asked the women why they thought these double standards were so prevalent. Piper put this down to "connotations", explaining that women aren't "supposed to be promiscuous or have a lot of sex". It seemed a woman who had a lot of sex was sanctioned as this was not appropriate or respected feminine behaviour, as Piper put it:

Piper: So, to them [men] it is like, there's gotta be something wrong with a girl if she has a lot of sex, why does a girl have to have that much sex?

At this point, I was keen to understand what kind of other expressions would be used in reference to a girl that has "something wrong with her" if she has "too much sex". How were the women defining wrong here? What was it that could be wrong? Earlier in our conversation, Piper mentioned the words "slut" and "whore" and I was wondering what other connotations this kind of talk and slurs had. So, I asked the women how they thought they would be perceived if they were, as Claire's roommate's boyfriend was, having sex with many different people and how they would be spoken about as a result:

Anna: I think they would use *[whispering]* the slut word
Claire: They would be like: "Oh she is gross"
Jen: They would just assume that you are dirty, that you have a STD or that something is wrong with you
Chiara: And have you heard them speak about women that way before?
All the women agree they have
Chiara: Do you have any examples?
Piper: I can't think of examples just because it is kind of like generally common, like if someone says like: "Oh that girl like she goes home with a lot of guys, like damn"
A: I am really good friends with my neighbours uhm, there's two guys in the room and so one of them was hooking up with this one girl who is in a different sorority here and he was like: "Oh I had to stop she's like a slut she's had sex with too many people, I could get a disease from her"

The language that the women refer to in the passage above seemed emotive, in that the words and phrases they used had strong connotations to women's so-called sexual promiscuity. Laden with significance was Piper's explanation that as it was so common for young women to experience and hear these adverse sexual labels, that at our time of talking she could not

actually think of any specific examples. Implied in her saying this was that this talk is so routine, so normalised that it goes unchallenged, perhaps becoming part of the fabric of everyday speech. In addition to this, it could be inferred from Piper's statement that the sheer number of terms used as slurs against women, and the pervasiveness of them, makes for an overwhelming task just to think of specific examples. Meanwhile the other women in the group were quite clear that the word slut had undertones of sexually transmitted disease, of being unclean and used up – and perhaps implying this was what would be "wrong" with a slutty woman. A slutty woman was thus doubly tainted; not only had she been promiscuous in her sexuality, but this promiscuity was assumed to have led to a woman being ascribed a diseased status.

By this point, it had become clear that this kind of language was reserved for women only. In fact, Laura, in a separate group, astutely explained the gendered rules guiding this double standard:

Laura: There are guys who sleep with the same girls in my sorority, like the same guy has slept with a bunch of the sorority sisters but we would never be like: 'Oh that guy he gets around', it is more like you make it a joke about each other like: 'you got with him, so did I'. But if a girl did that, that girl's a slut, so she got around a fraternity that is a double standard. We never talk about guys who do that – girls, it is automatic.

Laura's categorisation of the "automatic" double standard implied it was deeply and societally ingrained; in a way, a natural consequence of being a sexually experienced woman. In fact, Jen in another group shared her own experience which attested to Laura's statement above. Jen began by explaining that after she had hooked up some men who were all members of the same fraternity, she was as she said, on the path to becoming labelled a "founder". She clarified that a woman would be referred to as a founder if she had sex with seven men all of whom were members of the same fraternity. (The label itself was a play on words, coined as a reference to the seven male founders who established the fraternity itself). Jen explained that although she had not yet reached founder territory and thus hadn't slept with seven men in total, she was, as she put it: "kind of up there". It so happened that her past sexual partners and her current boyfriend were members of the same fraternity group. So, with her sexual history in mind, when her boyfriend's fraternity peers, or brothers as they are referred to, discovered that he and Jen were dating, things became difficult for her given her sexual history with some men in the same group:

Jen: When people found out that he was talking to me he just got, like, he was like… it was like hell froze over, his friends were pissed at him, they were mad at him –

Chiara: Why?

J: These were the same friends that, some of them I hooked up with, they were like: "Why would you wanna date her she's just gonna use you and leave you and she's just gonna hook up, she doesn't want you she doesn't wanna be with you." I always made it obvious if I hook up with a boy that if I didn't have feelings, I didn't have feelings and if I was going to have feelings, I was going to have feelings. I am very much able to separate myself in that way and I think boys forget that girls can do that too. I think that was one of the things that some of the boys struggled with, uhm, because they had only seen that side of me and that's awful that I did that to myself, they'd only seen this sexual being in me they hadn't seen me as a person as much. But once they got to hang out with me and my boyfriend together, they were like: "Woah she's an actual person who has feelings and not just a sex object that we can use and have used".

In her sleeping with multiple men who were members of the same fraternity Jen had become regarded – by the young men - as the non-committal, easy girl, unable to create emotional connections beyond hook ups. So much so that she was not considered to be worthy of the status of girlfriend. Though Jen seemed secure in her ability to separate out fleeting feelings from those more established and associated with long-term relationships, she also attributed blame to herself, arguing that it was "awful" that she "did that" to herself. Jen's wording here referred to her having had sexual intercourse with multiple men in the same fraternity group. Arguably, sex of the kind that Jen identifies here is casual in nature, bound up in a scenario of a fleeting hook-up as opposed to that of a long-term, more stable and committed relationship. What I inferred from this then is that in Jen saying "it was awful that I did that to myself" she was referring to her having casual sex, without attachment (e.g., as found in a committed relationship). I was struck by the contradiction here, that on the one hand Jen implied that she was strong, that she had full control over her emotions and could act accordingly but on the other, it seemed she struggled with self-shame as a result of her sexual choices. At the same time, she identified the young men as the ones who were unable to see her as "a person who has feelings". She suggested that these men considered her an object to be used exclusively for their own sexual benefit. But what was perhaps most surprising to me here was how Jen went on to describe how her boyfriend "still struggles" with her past sexual history and close encounter with the so-called founder identity. This was so much so that he, somewhat

shockingly, made her "promise that she was never going to become a founder". Despite finding this embarrassing, Jen complied with his request. Nevertheless, she explained to the group that her boyfriend continued to mention her past and as a result this made her feel "horrible":

Jen: I know what I did and I know he's hooked up with as many people or more than I have but he still like: "Oh but those are my fraternity brothers" [the men Jen had slept with in the past]. I didn't know at the time when I was hooking up with them, this was before I had met him, so it was kind of like… It is hard because he's my boyfriend and I do trust him and he trusts me, but it is still like, the fact that at the back of his mind he doesn't trust me, or he still fears that and that is not how I want to be perceived. But unfortunately, it is what happened

At this point in the conversation, I remember thinking that Jen's description of her boyfriend's actions could be considered to be teetering on the edge of manipulative; holding her sexual past over her in this way, almost as if she had to continue to repent for it. She stressed the very real and personal consequences of being sexually shamed, in that it had seeped into her current relationship, affecting trust and creating fear. This was all despite the fact that Jen knew her boyfriend had as many, if not more, sexual encounters and partners than she, though Jen was the one experiencing the penalties and he was exempt from any consequences. I probed Jen further at this point, asking her quite simply how almost becoming a so-called founder, the response by her boyfriend's peers and subsequently her own partners reaction, had made her feel:

Jen: How it makes me feel *[pauses, thinking here]* it makes me feel horrible still. I know he [her boyfriend] doesn't mean it and he doesn't mean to hurt my feelings in that way, he does understand that when I am like: "Oh it hurts my feelings when you say that" like he does get it. I kind of see where he is coming from, but I also don't. He made me wait a very long time before he had sex with me because he was scared I was going to like leave him and I understand that, if I like someone I am not going to shack them [have sex] on the first night I meet them so I was like: 'I do wanna wait', but he made me wait twice as long. […] It is unfortunate that it had to come down to that but at the same time, I deserved that sexual freedom to be a human being and like do what I wanted to do and feel comfortable with.

This last point that Jen makes, that she deserves to be sexually free as she chooses ties into themes explored in the previous chapter as we see Jen attempting to carve out some semblance

of sexual agency. However, while she recognises her right to sexual freedom, she considers herself in line with the view of her partner, that in having casual sex with multiple men she did something "awful to herself". Perhaps we can see the double bind of women's heterosexual agency here, in that the acknowledgement of a right to casual sex is known (e.g., "I deserve that sexual freedom") but the conditions in which women *can* fulfil and exercise these sexual rights in practice are constrained and limited by heterosexual discourses of appropriate feminine behaviour (e.g., "it' awful I did that to myself" aka, awful that Jen acted outside of the prescribed heterosexual discourse of femininity as passive by having casual sex).

Though Jen didn't actually reveal what her boyfriend said (or says) to her to "hurt her feelings" we can fill in the gaps, so to speak, in that perhaps his words and actions fall in line with similar sentiments used early on to vilify women with active sex lives. Perhaps her boyfriend didn't use such flagrant language such as slut and whore but veiled in his response to her sexual history is shaming. Though labels are used to shame and humiliate we can also see how they function as a way to discipline and subsequently punish women if they fall out of the respectable (gendered) lines. Taking Jen for example, her sexual history caused her to be regarded as a woman who wasn't to be trusted, so much so that her boyfriend made her wait before he had sex with her. Women need to work constantly to keep up with these sexual definitions and labels, navigating between being human beings with, in Jen's words the "sexual freedom to do what I wanted to do and feel comfortable with" and remaining pure and untarnished women. Being shamed for past sexual histories serves as a warning of sorts: adhere to the tropes of acceptable heterosexuality or face a downward spiral into degredation and chastisement.

Furthermore, the double standard here implies men are able to negate this sexual punishment; making sexual choices with little to no repercussions. For men, sleeping with multiple women may in fact be accepted as a normal part of male heterosexual life, after all, Jen did remark above that "boys forget that girls can do that too". It is so customary for men to have many sexual partners that it seems out of the realm of possibility for women. It seemed the only consequences men may face relates to whether they have had sexual encounters with women who are known to have "colourful" sexual pasts. After all, sex with a slut or a whore risks the male partner being infected with the sexually transmitted diseases that she is presumed to have, though it's true that at times the women suggested that they understood that the reputation that went alongside being a "whore" or a "slut" was no more than a social construct. Claire for example mentioned "that is totally fine if you are cool with that" (hypothetically in reference to

a woman having slept with 15 people). Jen also declared that she "deserved the sexual freedom to do that", and we saw how the women in the previous chapter were empowered by their ability to sexually experiment. Nevertheless, the young women's day-to-day experiences provide them with ample evidence that though these methods of sexual shaming and gendered double standards are societally constructed, they still have very real social consequences. All of these, along with the attempts to claim empowerment discussed in the previous chapter create a double bind for the heterosexual women in this thesis: be sexy but not too much, to avoid being deemed a slut or a whore. These phenomena will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent section of this thesis.

6.4 (Un)safe Sex: Practicing Condom Use in Heterosex

Here I intend to shift the focus to concerns around sexual health in heterosexual encounters. Ironically, given the discussion above around the associations between "slutty" women and sexually transmitted diseases, many of the women I spoke to in fact revealed that the young men they were having sex with viewed condom use with reluctance and trepidation. From the women's comments it seemed that the onus was on them to make sure sexual protection (i.e. protection against pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases) was being used when they were having sex. However, I was struck by how many of the women I spoke to described how their pro condom stance was often challenged by the men they were having sex with. As a result of this, the prevailing assumption was that young men would oppose and resist using condoms and thus, condom use was not an expected practice as part of most heterosexual encounters. Further to this, as the discussions around aversions to condom use developed, the women revealed how common it was to experience non-consensual condom removal. With this in mind then, this section details the women's personal accounts and views in relation to condom usage/non-usage, exploring the contextual conditions under which safe sex – through the use of condoms – is practiced.

A lot of these discussions around sexual health practices and attitudes towards the condom developed once I had asked the women to describe both their experiences of sexual education and/or their first experiences of heterosex, if they had indeed had sex. When discussing both of these topics early on, some of the women disclosed that they had in fact never used a condom in any of their past sexual experiences, as Rebecca put it: "from first time I have done it, up until now." I wondered what the reasoning was behind these admissions, were these personal

choices for the women and was safe sex then embarked upon through different alternatives to that of condoms? Or, was this lack of condom use simply normalised and expected practice in heterosex?

Chiara: So, is it a personal choice not to use a condom?
Rebecca: It is that and no one really has them, and I guess it is kind of, I don't really like, I have never gone in depth about this, I know there are STDs and stuff like this, I guess I have never really thought about it in a way. I feel like I can trust the people I am with and I feel like here especially. Where I grew up, it is more on the girls, it is more reliable like the methods that we have like compared to a condom. So, I feel like I know what I have I am protected, it is ok. I guess it is kind of personal –

Rebecca's explanation for never having used condoms rung true for the other women in the group. She mentioned "it is more on the girls", meaning that the responsibility to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancy is theirs alone. The other women, disclosing that they were using various forms of birth control, agreed with her statement, implying that the alternatives to condoms were more widely used. At the same time, though, Rebecca began by outlining this lack of condom use as influenced by the fact that it is so uncommon in her social world, as she put it: "no one here really has them". The reasoning here then seemed to be twofold, both a personal choice in that sexual health and protection is embarked upon via other avenues and due to the phenomenon of the condom being an object unlikely to feature in heterosexual encounters.

Further to this, Rebecca did recognise the possibility of her facing sexually transmitted infection as a result of a lack of her condom use, though in her own words she stated that "knowing what she has" and being on a form of birth control, was enough personal protection for her. Extending this, she went on to construct her sexual interactions and partners through the concept of trust: "I can trust the people I am with", she said, attributing this non-condom use to feeling confident in the fact that her partners can be relied upon to be honest about whether or not they have sexually transmitted diseases. Perhaps then for Rebecca, condom-less sex signified trust and commitment and these two things outweighed the potential health risks. Vanessa, meanwhile, somewhat punctured this idea of trust with the following statement:

Vanessa: I didn't use them because I was like: "Uh no one is using condoms here, whatever", but then I got chlamydia and I was like: "Oh my god!"

Vanessa's disclosure triggered some shock in the women, particularly in both Rebecca and Jessica who had previously shared their lack of condom use. With this revelation, the group began to grapple with the question of whether sexually active women should in fact be carrying, and thus using, condoms. This was encouraged by Vanessa, as once she had detailed her experience of having chlamydia, she made it clear that she felt that more young men should carry condoms, and in her own words, "it shouldn't be on the girl to do it". It seemed though that there was some deeper symbolism behind a woman who carried condoms. I am thinking here that condoms imply sexual activity and as we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, women can be chastised for being *too* sexually active. At this point however, Vanessa began to contradict herself somewhat:

Vanessa: I mean I think it is a little weird if they [women] carry them, I mean sure if a girl is having sex and she knows that she's having sex, whatever like carry condoms because guys are stupid and they're not going to have them for themselves

It was clear that for these women that condom use was rare, so much so that the young men they were having sex with could not be relied upon to practice safe sex through condom usage, simply because men often never had them. Moreover, the concept that it would be "a little weird" for a woman to carry condoms was felt throughout the group, albeit perhaps a bit more strongly with Jessica, Beth and Rebecca, reflected in the following exchange:

Jessica: I dunno why but the idea of a girl carrying around condoms, like the connotations of that is… Weird
Beth: Yeah, weird
Chiara: Why? What is weird about that?
J: Like she's, I dunno
Rebecca: I think it's you have so many other options. If I saw a girl and condoms fell out of her bag I would be a little like: "Oh she probably like sleeps around a lot"–
J: Yeah
R: Even though like I am not that good, I sleep around and stuff but it is just like… I guess my method is like hidden –

J: Yeah

R: It shouldn't be something broadcasted, so like pills and things that are inside of you, I think it is not something you talk about, you don't show it and carry it and be like: "Oh I have this" I feel like there is a negative look towards that

This passage speaks to the notion that alternatives to the condom are preferred as they are more discreet, as Rebecca puts it: "my method is hidden" (her method possibly being either the pill or an IUD). The women imply that to have more overt methods to practice safe sex (via condoms in this case) would be to make it publicly known that they are sexually active. This act would in turn bring social stigma; a woman with condoms is a woman who is sexually active and to take Rebecca's words, a woman who "sleeps around a lot", would arguably be challenging the traditional gendered constructions of socially acceptable sexual behaviour. As we have seen in the previous section, these young women are acutely aware of what it means to be defined as promiscuous, as slutty or as a whore. These metaphors of promiscuity thus ensure that it is difficult for women to be openly sexual and have condoms available. With this awareness of such labels then comes perhaps a need to distance themselves from the women who embody these definitions who are the so-called "other" - a girl who has condoms falling out of her bag to use Rebecca's example – and this distancing is achieved by using more hidden contraceptive options. Conversely, the same women did not attribute these same negative connotations to men having condoms. Men's possession of condoms was seen as unproblematic and sometimes even necessary. This was made clear when for example, Vanessa suggested that if she were a single male having sex "with other girls" she would be sure to have condoms readily available: "I would have condoms in my nightstand, or in my dresser, or I would have them at home." Tentatively speaking then, given the lack of negative descriptors for young men who are have many sexual partners and as young men are less likely, than young women, to be admonished for being sexually active in this way, condoms (if young men are to have them) have fewer negative connotations.

Similar description of men's non-condom usage was documented by other groups of young women I spoke to. These accounts became more complex in that the women mused over the reasons for this lack of condom use, while they also exposed how proposed condom use was sometimes considered an affront to young men. In one session, Claire and the other women in the group expressed their frustration at the lack of condom use in their heterosexual encounters

and went on to explain the next-day 'damage control' of sorts engaged in by the men they had sex with:

Claire: We shouldn't be having to ask for a boy to put on a condom, I guess when you're in the moment you're not thinking about it but then the next day when they text you: 'Uh can you buy Plan B?" [the morning after pill]
Jen: Or like: "Are you on birth control?"
C: Yeah!
J: For a mistake that *they* made
C: It is so preventable
Tara: Yeah
C: If they just like put on a condom!
Chiara: But they should ask you? [before having sex]
C: Yeah!
T: No, it is insane to me that they wait until the next day to ask you if you are on birth control
Tara, in the group, went on to highlight that in the past, she would have expected the men she was having sex with to have condoms available to use, she soon realised this wasn't the case:

Tara: Then I learned they're not normally gonna have them because they normally wouldn't want to wear them so why would they have the option? Then you're like: "Do you have a condom?" They're like: "No", and it is harder for you to be like: "Ok then never mind"… you know?
Chiara: And if they don't have one, is that a discussion beforehand or do they just assume that you are ok with them not wearing one?
T: Kind of just assume

Perhaps here the worry is that the mere suggestion of condom use mid-intercourse would act as a way to disrupt the flow of sex, or because it adds a sense of premeditation to an act that is usually considered spontaneous. Further to this, Tara highlighted that men's non-condom use is due to the fact that, as she said, men "wouldn't normally want to wear them". Arguably this presumed preference for men becomes routine and often goes unchallenged, as Tara said, "it's harder for you to be like, 'ok never mind'". I will explore in the section that follows the potential reasons that the young women I spoke to attributed to men's non-condom use, but for now, I will focus on the dynamic of women's potential passivity at men's lack of condom use that Tara

hinted at here. In her explaining that it is "harder for you to be like 'ok never mind'" it seemed as though she was rendered unable to articulate her own intention to want to use a condom. Claire too seemed to illustrate a similar dynamic:

Claire: I was hooking up with a guy once and like I asked him to put on a condom and like he did and then… He was like, uhm *[laughs]* he was like, uh, he had a girlfriend before this and I guess they like never used condoms or something and he was like: "I don't know how to do this with a condom"
Group laughs
C: And then the next time he didn't wear a condom and I just felt like not to ask because like it was so weird me asking the first time

Claire described here how her hook up partners initial unfamiliarity with the presence of a condom and reluctance to use one acted as an obstacle for her on successive occasions where they had sexual intercourse. Both Claire and Tara's accounts seemed to suggest an inability to instigate condom use, use which had, prior to getting to the sexual encounter, seemed an important requirement to them. Jen continued the exchange at this point, recognising and developing Claire's feeling and depiction of the "weird":

J: They [men] make you feel weird about it, if you ask [them to wear a condom] they act like you have asked for the most inappropriate –
Claire: Yeah! -
J: Dangerous thing
Chiara: What do they say to you, as a reaction?
Lots of overtalking between the women at this point
C: "Do you think I have an STD or something?"
J: "Do you not trust me?" All this stuff and you're like: 'wait what?' They turn it on you –
C: Yeah
J: But this is what we are supposed to do, we are supposed to have this conversation

There is something here that can not be explored without having interviewed young men but could, nevertheless, possibly be inferred at this point. What I mean is that the women suggest that young men have some embarrassment and shame about not knowing how to use condoms and it may well be this which gets in the way of either having a proper conversation about

condom use, or about how to wear a condom correctly. Proposal of condom use was reportedly met with young men questioning women's trust and, according to the women I spoke to, telling a partner that condom use is wanted can signal to their sexual partner that they could potentially be the source of infection, offending them in the process. Because of this, perhaps it can sometimes be easier for the women to acquiesce in opposition to condoms in an effort to avoid a hurt response from their male partners, as described above. In fact, this scenario was familiar for other women I spoke to. For example, Beth explained how men, in her words, "get butt hurt if you ask", referring to asking them to use a condom, to which the other women in the group agreed. Beth went on to share that despite this, she always asks the men she has sex with if they have a condom, because as she put it, she was "terrified of being a mom". Despite having a real fear of unwanted pregnancy, Beth described a similar dynamic to that of Tara and Claire, in that she oftentimes compromises her stance on condom use as a result of men's reactions:

Beth: Because it is just like, I am always like: "Do you have a condom?" because I am terrified of being a mom. But, uhm, they would always like get butt hurt and I am like, one I don't know where your dicks been, I don't know who your dick has been inside of, so it is like… I mean, granted I will have sex with people even when they are like: "Oh no" and I am like… 'ok', it just makes me a little more sketched out and I will really make sure I go and get checked [for sexually transmitted diseases]

Beth's admission that she was "terrified" of the prospect of being a mother, was somewhat contradicted by her having confessed to having sex with men despite there not being the presence of a condom. Though she also signalled, in a way, that condom use for her was a confident act of self-protection, as she exclaimed: "I don't know where your dick has been", further emphasising the need for sexual protection. However, this power seemed to dissolve when the men she was having sex with felt slighted at her introduction of condom-use. Women's possible passivity here then may develop as a response to men's reactions, reactions which act as a barrier in some cases, constraining women from making condom use a reality.

There is a sort of mutually reinforcing set of gendered assumptions at play here too. What I mean by this is that as the young women explain, the men they are having sex with ask them whether they are using the contraceptive pill, and this is because the young women themselves are not actively telling, or sharing, this information with young men. Yet at times in the

discussions, we can see the young women bemoaning the fact that the men did not ask. The women are then, in a way, expecting the man to be active around a conversation of contraception and safe sex practices but are not necessarily being active themselves. At this point then, the women speaking up and telling their partner that they are using contraception, or having a discussion about condom use, all become somewhat unsayable as they goes against the unwritten rules of how a heterosexual encounter should take place (spontaneously, without interruption, with women being passive recipients). This in turn perhaps speaks of the women unconsciously buying into gendered stereotypes around heterosex, of what can be said and who can be sexually agentic.

Women imply anticipating that their suggestion of condom use will be challenged, and in some cases manipulated (e.g., Jen and Claire's "do you not trust me?" "do you think I have an STD?"). Potentially, a reaction of this kind causes the women to feel a sense of pressure to have condom-less sex, abandoning any measures to ensure condom use in order to avoid an offended response. In sum then, women have to balance the risk of pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease against the risk of insulting their male sexual partners (Holland et al, 1998).

6.4.1 (Un)safe Sex: Condom Misuse and Stories of Violation

At this point, we can argue that condoms have a powerful social meaning. We have seen for example, how the mere act of being in possession of condoms can signal a certain sexual knowingness for women (Holland et al, 1998). Indeed, it may well be difficult for young women to construct positive feminine identities alongside the idea of being the sexually active woman given the abundance of normalised negative stigma here: for example, being easy, being a slut and a whore (Holland et al, 1998). Young women are aware then – as we have seen from the previous section - that there are negative repercussions with being identified as a woman who has such knowledge. Further to this, the young women in this research seemed to be concerned with sexual safety but suggested that in actuality, it was difficult to commit and practice safe sex in their heterosexual encounters. It was quite clear that the women felt asserting their own needs by insisting on condom use could potentially upset their sexual partners. Understanding this, it seemed the choice of accepting unsafe sex outweighed the prospect of hurting their partners feelings. Unprotected sex then, seemed to be a reasonable, or at least manageable, trade-off. In sum, the women seemed to express a constraint of sorts on their agency in sexual encounters when it came to sexual protection. Difficulties expressed by the women here indicate or suggest some tensions and hidden pressures within heterosex (Holland et al, 1998).

With this in mind and in an effort to develop an understanding of how some of these tensions may unfold and exist in heterosex, the following section is dedicated to highlighting the personal stories of unsafe sex from the women I spoke to.

To begin a reflection on the personal stories of non-consensual condom removal, I would like to highlight Hannah's disclosure. Hannah shared that during a fraternity party, she met a young man, who was in her words, "really good looking." She was content when, during the party they "made out" and spent time together. Once the party was over, they walked home together and things progressed to become sexual, at this point in the story, she shared the following:

Hannah: Uhm, I remember saying: "I don't have a condom", and him just being on top of me and being like: "You're on birth control, right?" And I had never had a guy ask me this and I was like: "Yeah" and he was like: "Well that's fine if you are on birth control"

Hannah went on to explain that once it was established between the two of them that she was on birth control, the man in question made his intentions quite clear, as she remembered him saying to her, "I just really want to have sex with you right now". Reflecting, she told the group that they did indeed have sex, though it seemed she had reservations:

H: Thinking back on it I had been manipulated but at the time it didn't occur to me […] Like I let him do it [sex] because he was a little bit older and he told me it was ok, I was on birth control and he really wanted to do it so I gave consent because I was too scared, maybe not too, maybe too scared not to -
Nicole: You don't wanna seem like you didn't know?
H: Yeah, like uncool or whatever

Hannah revealed that she felt she had been manipulated to have sex in this scenario and her account demonstrates how sexual assertiveness (to use a condom for example) can be anything but straightforward. Her word choice stuck me here, particularly as she said, "I let him do it." In this construction of herself as a passive participant, (even though she had herself managed to bring up the subject of the condom), Hannah implied that rather than being present and engaged in this particular sexual encounter, sex was being done *to* her. Hannah inferred there were various pressures at play that possibly made her feel a lack of agency to steer the encounter

in her preferred direction. What I mean by this is that, despite Hannah beginning the encounter with a clear indication toward her preference for condom use, this was circumvented as she was reassured - by the man in question - that her own birth control would be sufficient, abandoning the need for a condom in the process. Arguably, Hannah was somewhat in unknown territory at this point, with the expression of reassurance itself being a surprise to her as she made it clear: "I had never had a guy ask me this". She then continued to explain that she gave consent because she was too "scared". Though as soon as she offered up this word, she seemed unsure of its choice. It seemed to me that Hannah implied that the man involved here was behaving with some sense of sexual insistence and unstoppability, making it clear to her that he wanted, and perhaps expected, sex with her. With that in mind, it seemed like Hannah did not want to be identified as sexually unexperienced as a response to this man's perceived urgency. Using the word "uncool" she reminded me of what Vanessa dubbed, in the previous chapter, being the "desirable, cool girl", perhaps this is what Hannah wanted to embody. Hannah's disclosure fuelled a discussion around stealthing – or non-consensual condom removal - with another woman in the group, Sophia, revealing that she had experienced a partner removing a condom unbeknownst to her at the time of intercourse:

Sophia: Uhm, for me, I had a guy take the condom off without telling me –
One woman agrees, another gasps
S: And I didn't know like I couldn't see it, and that, that really pissed me off –
Nicole: Hell yeah
S: I think that happens to more girls than –
N: Yep

Sophia went on to share that the man who had done this excused himself by explaining that the condom had simply "fallen off", while she was certain that he had actively removed it. Incidentally, both herself and Nicole were in fact right in their suggestion that stealthing was a common occurrence for young women, at least amongst the women I spoke to. Indeed, in all of the conversations I had, at least one woman in each group disclosed that they had experienced non-consensual condom removal during a sexual encounter. One woman's story in particular stood out and in my second focus group, Piper shared her own detailed account of stealthing. Piper described a situation where, after a party, she and Tara (another woman in the group) were invited to the home of two men they knew, I will refer to these men as Ben and Dan. All four of the group were sitting on the same couch, watching TV and Piper explained

that her and Ben began "making out." After sitting all together for some time, Tara then explained that Ben "all of a sudden" picked Piper up and took her to his room:

Tara: And I like look over at Dan and I was just like: 'I don't think that's ok' and then like I think I like called out and I was like: "Piper are you ok?" I think I said something, I like texted you and called you or something -
Piper: Yeah, she didn't just leave me, but I did have sex with Ben and I haven't talked to him since and it was just a very odd situation.

At this point in the conversation Piper turned to the other women and asked them if it would be "weird" if she shared her "condom thing", as she referred to it as, with the group. The women reassured and encouraged her, and so, she continued:

P: So, I asked him to wear a condom, he did at first and then he just decided to take it off in the middle of it and he finished inside of me and I… The next morning, I had to go and get Plan B and I remember, I think I was talking to you *[referring to another women in the group]* and I was just crying because like, at that point I was very, very drunk when we were having sex and for him to just disregard what I asked him to do, uhm bothered me a lot as it should have I guess. I just think, I think if a girl is having sex with you and is requesting something of you, it is not that hard to wear a condom. And, like I didn't realise he had taken the condom off until it was too late…

Piper went on to share that this act felt like a violation for her and that she: "really didn't want to" have sex with Ben and she continued to describe what happened that evening:

P: That same night though after I had sobered up a little bit and I realised what happened, I was putting my clothes on and I was like: "I am going home" and he was like: "No stay the night" and I was like: "no, like I wanna go home." And he just kept pulling me back to bed and and I was like: "no!" And I started getting kind of panicked and just because he was being very, like: "No come lay down." I finally got all my clothes on and I literally ran home, like ran, not that he was chasing me, but I was just like, frightened.

Piper felt, to use her own words, "pressured", and throughout our conversation she continued to describe the event as a "weird, really odd situation". The aftermath was also difficult for her

to grapple with, she explained that she felt "awful" and reflecting back she asked herself how it was possible for someone to remove a condom without her consent, calling the act "disgusting". For Piper though, the most troublesome part of that evening for her was the following:

P: And the part that bothered me the most about that night is the fact that he did take his condom off, like that whole, if we would have just had sex with a condom normally it wouldn't have bothered me really

After what had happened, Piper revealed that she hadn't spoken to Ben at all, avoiding him at all costs. She shared that her and some other women in the group had actually seen him the night prior to us speaking. When she had realised it was him, she explained that she moved herself and "went to the other side of the room". She did this as, in her own words she "didn't even want to look at him". She also disclosed concern that Ben could be doing what he did to her with other women, as she said, "I really don't want him to do that to someone else".

Once Piper had shared her story with the group, I was keen to understand if the women had any views as to why so-called stealthing occurred in heterosex. In answer to my question, the women voiced a range of opinions:

Claire: I think they [men] just like, like it better, it feels better for them without a condom
Piper: I think they think at that point you are already having sex and it feels good for the girl so they're not going to care if the guy just like takes it off because they're still going to be like enjoying it
Jen: And I think they think that like girls are so into it at that point that they're like: "Oh it is ok if I do this because she is really into it she's not gonna say no" –

Non-consensual condom removal was a clear violation of sexual autonomy for the women who spoke to me of having experienced it. At the same time, it seemed here that the women were speaking to various tropes and had certain perceptions of young men's sexual preferences in explaining why they thought non-consensual condom removal was so prevalent. Could the young women's perception that men happen to "like sex better" and that sex "feels better" for men without a condom also point to why the phenomenon of condom-less sex seemed so widespread for the young women I spoke to? Possibly, but what stood out to me here was that not only could the preference toward condom use be ignored before sex began (and thus

condom-less sex was consented to, albeit at times in a pressured manner, as Hannah illuminated), but also, as the women's narratives here demonstrate, the desire to use a condom could also be disregarded *during* sex (thus making the sex a bodily violation, an abuse of trust and indeed an offence in some jurisdictions as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter).

A common theme seemed to be that condom removal would go unnoticed or unchallenged due to the fact that sexual intercourse was already happening. This was exemplified at the end of the discussion as Tara revealed to the group that she too had experienced non-consensual condom removal although as she put it, she "didn't notice until the end, obviously". I want to exercise some caution here against pathologizing men's reasons for non-consensual condom removal however; to ruminate on this for a moment, it seemed to me that the young women were suggesting that when in the midst of sex, men view anything as being permissible. If it is the case that, according to the traditional discourses of male heterosexuality, young men's needs are paramount and that their sexual drive once aroused must be satiated, men in the young women's sexual encounters are the ones with much of the power. This power includes changing the course of sex to suit their needs, and to remove a condom even if sex has been consented to on the condition of its use.

Young women are then, reportedly, grappling with a range of tensions here and possibly caught in a double bind of sorts. They know any advocation for condom-use prior to sex risks being rejected outright by men, causing the women to feel somewhat powerless in advocating for their requirement for sexual protection. At the same time, even when sex is consented to on the condition of a condom, the women are acutely aware of the possibility that the condom can be, and has been, removed at any time without consent or even conversation.

6.5 Consenting to Unwanted Sexual Experiences as a Method of Self-Work

At the same time that the women reflected upon the very clear experiences of sexual violations (e.g. non-consensual condom removal), many of them also identified sexual encounters that were more nebulous which, nevertheless, were recognised to have the propensity to turn violent and risky. In these often unwanted and unwelcome sexual experiences the women shared an overwhelming concern to uphold their own safety. In order to deescalate these sexual situations, the women reported using various, and sometimes convoluted, techniques and methods which involved a form of self-work (which I theorise in more detail in the subsequent discussion

chapter) to manage themselves, others and these situations. There seemed to be an acute awareness that sexual situations can turn dangerous, so much so that it seemed the responsibility of the young women to manage men's – and their own – emotions in an effort to preserve some sense of safety. It was in my first focus group that Nicole spoke to this particular phenomenon of sexual encounters taking a risky, unwelcome turn:

Nicole: I think that it is because you have all either been in the situation where someone is taking advantage of us or we know someone who has been in that situation and I think it is also not only taken advantage of, but we know people who have been in those situations where guys turn kinda scary. Maybe they're drunk and they turn into mean drunks and they are bigger guys than us and not saying that any of us couldn't defend ourselves but it is also just the nature of men. Uhm and so I think it is just because we have heard these stories either like been in a situation before or been close to the situation before or know people who have had those awful experiences that it is just like when you are in that situation it just comes to your mind like: 'what if I say no to him and he gets really mad? What if I say no to him and he never wants to talk to me again? What if I say no to him now and he like does something awful?'

Nicole refers to the "nature of men", which seemingly is quite an emotive, Darwinian, statement. Although what she means by this remains unclear here, perhaps we can deduce that she suggests anger is a "natural" reaction of a man who is denied sex, particularly as she said: "what if I say no and he gets mad?". I was struck by the way in which the women seemed to be precariously treading through these sexual situations:

Laura: I think it is a combination of looking at the clock and wondering when it is maybe going to come to a close on its own so you don't have to say 'no' and a combination of, wanting to wait to say 'no' so that you don't like look like a bitch or look like or he will –
Nicole: It will make him mad
L: Or, like he doesn't wanna hang out with you again or doesn't, or maybe spreads like [rumours], I dunno this is kinda stupid sounding, to where he spreads like: 'oh don't talk to her she's not gonna put out', which like I don't really care but I don't want people to not talk to me because like I am more than just sex

Being calm, rational and introspective in this way was not only done in an effort to alleviate and, in a sense, manage men's emotions of potential anger, but the women also seemed to

behave in this way because they were worried about the consequences should they outright refuse men sexually. We see this quite clearly above as Laura mentioned being concerned not so much with Nicole's comment that acting in a more assertive way will "make him mad", but she explained she was more so aware that her reputation could be tarnished through rumour-spreading (e.g. 'Oh don't talk to her she's not gonna put out'). Though Laura clarified that she "didn't really care" about this eventuality, she nevertheless mentioned it to the group, signalling that it *was* a real concern. Once Laura had expressed her concerns another woman in the group, Liv, opposed that by saying "if a guy won't talk to you because you won't put out, that's not the type of guy I would want to talk to me". Though she went on to explain this perhaps was, in her own words, "easier said than done":

Liv: That is shitty to me that we worry about our reputations after saying no. I had a friend that uh, she like gave somebody a blow job for the very first time that she didn't know [how to do it] and so obviously it didn't go well, and he told all of his friends and she was like super embarrassed about it. She probably felt pressured because like he was asking her to and then when it didn't go well, he still like talked about and if she had said no maybe he still would have talked about it like: 'oh she's a prude'. I just hate that on top of already being worried about your own boundaries and what you have agreed to you are also worrying about their [men's] perception of you like after the interaction and like the things that will be said about you

Liv succinctly summarised the conflicting circumstances the women faced here. To me, it seemed this tied in with the ideas explored in the previous chapter, particularly that the young women seemed to be caught in a bind of difficult social pressures and conflicting conditions from which there seemed to be little escape. I say this as the women were acutely aware that they had to avoid being *too* sexually experienced, all the while they were expected to "put out", to use Laura's wording. As these two, seemingly contradictory positions, coexisted the women still had to grapple with the fact that refusing sex can, as both Laura and Liv point out, cause them to be considered frigid or prudish.

Going back to the theme of the tempering of possible anger or violence from sexual partners that Nicole alluded to, it seemed that other women also had experienced this phenomenon. In discussing rejecting men's sexual advances, Beth shared with the group that she found it hard to clearly refuse unwanted sex, in her own words she said she had "always been scared of what to say" in these sexual encounters. Beth went on to explain that her inability to 'just say no' as

it were, came from a fear of men "getting mad and lashing out". Beth contextualised these feelings in relation to past sexual violence she had experienced, she revealed to the group that she had been raped twice and, at the time of us speaking, Beth was going through the Title IX process. In the United States, Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 (otherwise referred to as Title IX), is a federal civil rights law which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex (this includes sexual harassment and sexual assault) in educational programmes or activities (United States Department of Education, 2020). Any university receiving federal funds must comply with Title IX, meaning that schools have a duty to respond promptly to address sexual violence (United States Department of Education, 2020). A Title IX hearing as part of this response investigates accusations of sexual assault or harassment (United States Department of Education, 2020). Though Beth did not go into great detail about the hearing itself – and I was sure not to excessively press her to discuss it – she described it as the "worst experience of her life." Linking these past events to her concerns around transparently refusing sex, Beth illuminated that her perspective on sex and relationships had "really changed" as a consequence of this violence:

Beth: I have such a fear around sex after both of those events occurring […] especially with what's happened to me, I am like, I think there's this fear of like them *[men]* getting mad and lashing out at me or something –
Chiara: Why do you think they would do that?
B: I just, I dunno, I don't trust guys really anymore… Like I feel like I, I feel like bad generalising everyone and putting everyone together… Uhm I just, I have seen even when I haven't been having sex or been around guys and I have been like: "Hey I am not going to have sex with you" they have got like almost aggressive –

At this point all of the other women in the group recognised Beth's account of men becoming "almost aggressive" when it's made clear sex is out of the question, Jess, Vanessa and Rebecca all made it clear that they too had shared this experience. Jess noted that even though she had told men in the past that she was not going to have sex with them, they, in her words "wouldn't let her leave". Having experienced the situation which both Beth and the rest of the group shared, some women also highlighted strategies they used to both avoid scenarios whereby their sexual refusals were ignored or challenged, and indeed to curb any potential anger or aggressiveness. Sarah, in a separate group, shared her own story, explaining that during a date

with a man they were both in her car and he asked her if the seats reclined. To this she explained that they did, and the following happened:

Sarah: He got on top of me and started dry humping me and I was just like, 'what just happened?!'
Chiara: And he didn't ask you?
S: No! He didn't ask! I just said "Yes, the seats go back…"

I asked Sarah at this point how she felt during the encounter:

Sarah: Really uncomfortable, since it happened so fast, I felt like, like: 'Ok this isn't terrible' and you just wait like a minute and push them away, instead of immediately saying no. Maybe I wait a couple minutes, I am watching the clock and I am like 'Ok this is long enough'. And he's like "Are you sure you want me to leave?" and I am like "Yeah". But also like the entire date, from the first ten minutes, I knew there was not going to be a second date. So, the entire time I was like 'let me just act like, you know, this is fine, you know, just don't make things awkward and this will just never happen again.' By the time that he was already on top of me I was already in the mind set of not making a big deal of things, I was just kind of like 'I can deal with this for five minutes' and pushed him away

Despite her feeling very real discomfort, Sarah spoke of being, in a sense, willing to tolerate certain sexual behaviours from the man in her car, all in an effort to not "make things awkward", as she put it. It almost seemed to me that there was a category of behaviours here, with some worse than others, some bearable, others not, some which the women knew they could manage and could – and would - put up with. The act of non-consensual "dry-humping" then, was unwanted but nevertheless endured. Although I did not ask, it made me wonder what Sarah thought would have happened had she resisted, though perhaps she already knew that doing so would escalate things further and thus she made her choice accordingly: "act like, you know this is fine, I can deal with this for five minutes." I understood Sarah's use of the words 'you' as opposed to I and 'you know' as a signal that these events would be felt collectively by all of the women, rather than individualised, rare occurrences and because of this, the other women in the group would be familiar with her experience because they had knowledge of it too. And indeed, women in other focus groups tolerated such behaviours in a similar way, Terri

in the same group for instance, resonated with Sarah's story, explaining that she is "always one step ahead of the guy":

Terri: I am thinking: 'Ok if I say ok to this what do I have to say?' Where is this going to go? And at what point am I saying no?' Because I also am not sexually active and I haven't met anybody that I wanna get naked in front of so it hasn't happened yet but… Uhm, it is always like, I can't just like relax because I gotta be like 'ok well if he does this then I gotta be prepared for the next step and is that where I wanna say no or do I wanna say no after that?'

Terri and Sarah's responses were illuminating here as they disclosed the ways in which they would examine their actions, as well as the sexual scenario itself, reflexively asking themselves what they were willing to endure, what act would be too much and at what point would it be safe to bring the unwanted encounter to a close. While Terri did contextualise her own experience in not being sexually active, it still seemed that rejecting a man sexually was risky, with potentially serious consequences, and thus, these methods were used in the place of an outright 'no'. Liv disclosed that she too would use the same strategy, in her own words because she didn't want to "lead them on too far", (them being men in this case). To this, Terri agreed and admitted that adhering to such a method made it hard for her to "enjoy herself." To this, Liv agreed:

Liv: Yeah! And you are always thinking about 'what is the natural way for me to pull out of this?' like 'ok you know what, I am good now'

However, the question remained, and perhaps it is rhetorical at this point: what would happen if these young women were to 'lead men on'? To me it seemed that a rejection had to be natural, not forceful, calm and not and concealed and these methods offered a way to cloak their refusals. When offering up a hard and fast 'no!' has the potential to make a woman "look like a bitch" or risks making a man 'mad', 'angry' and 'aggressive', it's no wonder other methods have been concocted. Some women, meanwhile, had more rigorous strategies to free themselves from unwanted scenarios, this became clear as Hannah and Sophia had the following exchange:

Hannah: I will say that now that I have an apartment with my own room, I will never go back to a boy's apartment. You will be coming to my place, where I feel comfortable

Women agree here

H: That way, if in the middle of something, I feel uncomfortable I will send you on your merry way. I am not going to have to be like: "what's the address? I need to call an uber." I walk out and your roommates are there on the couch, finding my way out. Fuck no, you'll be coming to my place and I will decide if you spend the night

Sophia: The easiest way that I have found to get out of situations is to say: "Hang on right quick I need to go to the bathroom." You take your phone on the way to the bathroom and text, I have a code word with both my parents, my roommate, everybody, and depending on the word and what the response is, it is 'come get me, call me and give me an excuse or call the cops.' So, like it sucks that we even have to have that but that to me has been the most, fool-proof. Because if my mom calls me and says: "You need to come home right now" I am like, I feel like a guy would be like: "Oh ok it is your mom." Whereas if: "Hey I gotta go!" It is a little bit more like: "Oh what ya gotta go for?" Like, if your mom sounds frantic on the phone and you act frantic, he's not gonna argue with two frantic women

All of these preservation efforts, from the convoluted plans described above to the acquiescence to some, but not all, sexual acts, took place because to reject men's interests outright would open the young women up to the possibility of men becoming violent. These methods can thus be considered necessary moments of self-work to bring about a semblance of self-defence. It is important to point out that enduring unwanted sexual acts in the way the women have described here is not problematic because it may be considered illegal misconduct (in fact not once did the women I spoke to reflect on these experiences as criminal violations). In actual fact, concentrating on the potential criminality of the behaviour here limits its significance in a way; portraying women as the victim and potentially setting a punitive precedent. I also wonder whether a reliance on the criminal aspect really affords women the power to change things.

Instead to me what is interesting here is that the normalisation of this non-consentuality seemed to be manifested through a negotiation, albeit with only one person present – the woman. In this process the women seemed to be engaging in self-work by asking themselves, internally, 'what is it that I will put up with', 'what am I willing to tolerate sexually?' Once these lines between enjoyable, endurable and abhorrent behaviour - a line recognised by all the women I spoke to - was drawn, women would vow to themselves this act would "never happen again" and thus there would be no need for similar internal negotiations. In this micro-dynamic of power then, the women seemed to be caught in a balancing act of experiencing, anticipating

and avoiding risk, as well as experiencing and offering pleasure. The women seemed to be understanding men through the emotions they attributed to them: anger, aggression, embarrassment and nastiness - traits which were considered by some to simply be part of the "nature of men." Even if the young women had not experienced violence, they still were almost hypervigilant to it as it seemed to be a constant possibility, one wrong move and it could happen.

In order to ensure their safety in these unwanted sexual encounters, reportedly unable to 'just say no', the women had to act calmly, and reflexively move themselves through sexual positions, advances, touches and gestures, enduring these acts for some time, plotting meanwhile to bring the encounter to a close naturally. I regarded this form of self-work (which I explore in depth, in relation to existing literature, in the chapter that follows), a way to manage their own as well as men's emotions, to avoid the escalation to violence, anger or aggression. However, at the same time, the women were caught in a double bind in that they grappled with the notion that should they manage their own and men's emotions too forcefully and overtly, they would not only risk facing men's anger but they also feared experiencing harmful sexual shaming (being regarded as sexually unskilled prudes, or sluts for example).

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to highlight a major theme appearing in the data which speaks to the young women's reported fears and anxieties in their heterosexual lives. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the young women in this thesis have to contend with mixed messages and double binds in relation to their pleasure/desires and how to behave as 'respectable' heterosexual women. Here the picture is just as complex as we see how heterosexual discourses of male sexuality constrain women's ability to safely navigate moments of physical discomfort in their sexual encounters. Further to this, discourses of heterosexuality revealed in the previous chapter (and which will be examined in the discussion chapter that follows), wherein men's sexuality is considered as active and pursuant and women's sexuality is deemed passive (Hollway, 1996) create a harmful sexual double standard. The women interviewed as part of this thesis spoke of the shame they had experienced as a consequence of this bind: requiring them to tread a fine line between going too far, having too much sex and thus being judged a slut or a whore, or being cold, sexually inexperienced and thus shamed. While we see the young women in the previous chapter speaking to a sense of sexual agency and resistance, playing with being sexual clearly carries considerable risk. On top of this, despite some women's preference for condom use in their sexual encounters, this in practice was rarely respected. At times this led to the women contracting sexually transmitted diseases (as was the case with Vanessa). Meanwhile, at other times, sex that was consented to on the condition of a condom became a bodily violation and potentially a sexual offence when condoms were removed unbeknownst to and against the wishes of the women.

All of these risks and anxieties culminated, in a sense, in the theme explored in the final section of this chapter where women's reports of self-work are detailed. All of these acts - from consenting to foreplay and touching, to managing their responses to sexually aroused men – paint a picture of women in a sort of complex internal conflict, constrained in their reactions and responses in fear of their safety. In sum, it is possible at this point in the thesis to consider the women's heterosexual reflections in line with Carol Vance's (1989: 1) juxtaposition of pleasure/danger which was signalled briefly at the start of this chapter. What this means is that the young women, arguably have to navigate and weigh the pleasures of their sexuality against the cost of that sexual pleasure in their daily choices and acts (Vance, 1989: 1). A more in-depth discussion of this characterisation of women's experiences of heterosex in relation to the

gendered nature of discursive power, as well as emotion and safety work, will be addressed in the following chapter.

Chapter Seven – Discussion

7.1 Introduction

While this study has explored college-aged women's reflections on their heterosexual lives; their pleasures, desires, practices, difficulties and risks, this thesis is as much about gender as it is about heterosexuality. It is critical to keep in mind that the subsequent analysis follows gendered lines of, for example, what it means to be a traditionally feminine heterosexual woman and how the young women have to act out both their gender and sexuality to fit this view. What has become apparent at this stage is that the women's experiences were both complex and contradictory, fluctuating but sometimes stable in echoing some of the heterosexuality research of the past. Importantly, I interpret from the data that the young women's heterosexuality was highly nuanced. It may be true that some of the experiences shared in this thesis fit into the well-documented radical feminist view that heterosexuality, as an institution, is regressive as it offers men the opportunity to exercise power over women (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1994; Allen, 2003; Jeffreys, 1990; MacKinnon, 1983). Yet, to interpret *all* of the young women's experiences in such narrow way would be to ignore a consistent pattern emerging in this work, that, although recognising that they are at times unequal to their male sexual partners, sexual situations still involved agency and pleasure for the young women in this research. That is, that women carved out ways to transform heterosex (and the power relations that exist within it) subsequently mediating, albeit briefly, the dominant discourses of heterosexual women as powerless actors in a wider system of domination (Renold and Ringrose, 2013; Spencer and Doull, 2015: 906). There were quite obvious moments which underscored this during the focus groups, particularly when the young women expressed that their own sexual pleasure was overlooked by their sexual partner(s) and consequently men's desires were considered the main focus of heterosexual encounters. Subsequently, this meant that the women were bound to provide men with sexual pleasure and it was the act of bringing men to orgasm which was powerful and seductive, as for in that brief moment men were considered vulnerable in that they were somewhat beholden to women for pleasure.

Thinking about power specifically then in this section, I attempt to explore the nuances of both how power manifests itself and how it is resisted. In some ways male power was particularly pervasive through these women's heterosexual lives but it was not monolithic, rather at times

it was contested and negotiated (Allen, 2003: 235, 236). As it has been noted, in the previous chapters, much of the data presented seems to reflect dominant discourses of heterosexuality explored in existing research. These discourses regularly featured in my conversations with the young women. For example, they still reportedly experienced a sexual double standard; what it meant to be sexually feminine and masculine was understood from a stereotypically gendered lens and sex itself was often shaped by and for male desire. It is also important to note that the women I spoke to had a critical consciousness of such inequalities in heterosex and they themselves recognised that some aspects of their heterosexual lives ought to be challenged for being harmful. Harmful in the sense that certain acts, for example non-consensual condom removal, caused harm to the young women's sense of self and their wellbeing, while it also worked to limit their freedom (e.g., they felt they couldn't, at times, confront their partners about the aforementioned non-consensual condom removal). So, there then seems to be some conflict within the reflections of heterosexuality presented in this thesis and it is for this reason that I agree with Allen (2003: 235, 236) when she suggests that: "a conceptualisation of power needs to capture both women's experiences of agency in heterosexual relationships and the way in which these relationships are simultaneously governed by power."

7.1.1 Analytical Hypotheses

With this considered, heterosexuality for the women in this study seemed to be a contested site, where young women were afforded, albeit few, opportunities to disrupt power, accessing sexual agency and transforming heterosexuality. Though, this takes place in an environment whereby traditional heterosexual discourses of gender and sexuality are still present, working to restrict the young women's subversions as a result (Harris, Aapola and Gonick, 2000: 887). The women I spoke to continue to tread a fine line between male power, traditional heterosexual discourses and their own sexual agency, while their heterosexual lives also take considerable work to maintain. What we are left with then and central to this thesis are different possibilities that, although somewhat contradictory, exist alongside one another as follows:

- That young women are adapting and adhering to restrictive ideologies which dictate what it means to be a traditionally 'feminine' heterosexual woman
- Young women are able to carve out some autonomy in these oppressive structures
- That they engage in emotion and safety work to cope with unpleasant situations and this work consists of them working on the self: managing their own as well as the emotions of men and devising complex plans to preserve their physical and sexual safety

- Finally, the young women can be seen as participating in a form of sex work: an extension of emotion work, this appears to show the women observing the 'rules' of how heterosex ought to be experienced which predominantly involves behaviours such as, faking orgasm and prioritising male pleasure

As a consequence of these four hypotheses, this chapter will explore the data using three notions of power and three conceptualisations of emotion work.

7.2 Conceptualising Power

In thinking about the notion of power in relation to the experiences of heterosex highlighted in this this research, and relating to the first two hypotheses above, there seem to be three patterns across the data. Firstly, that some acts were coerced and that the young women were living with the knowledge that in their heterosexual encounters, the men involved hold the concentration of the power with little impunity. Secondly, power seemed to be disciplined, what this means is that it followed certain discourses and the women, and their actions/behaviour, were bound within this discursive structure. Lastly, power was at times performed from a site of agency, evolving into empowerment as the young women expressed mediating the aforementioned oppressive structures. I will consider three conceptualisations of power in line with these emerging patterns, beginning with an analysis of coercive, gendered power, moving then to highlight discursive power under a Foucauldian lens and concluding with an exploration into how these forms of power might be mediated and resisted.

7.2.1 Coercive Power

If we think about coercive power then, we can consider this concept to be one in which young men exercise repressive power over young women by attempting to overtly or covertly force them to engage in an activity they do not want (Allen, 2003: 236). Catharine MacKinnon's (1983: 532; 1987; see also, Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1993: 211; see also other radical feminist work by Dworkin and Millett for example) work becomes fundamental here, particularly her categorisation of heterosexuality as a socially constructed form of power in which sex is something men *do* to women. The well-established position in this school of thought is that men dominate and control women, through heterosexual relations and thus heterosexuality becomes the foundation in which men dominate (Mackinnon, 1983; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1993: 121). In line with this view, sexual acts which involve violence, coercion and even consent

all fall for Mackinnon (1983: 532; see also, Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1993: 121) under a dynamic of male dominance and female subordination. In *Feminism Unmodified*, Mackinnon establishes the extent to which coercion, in her view, is a normal part of intercourse:

> Men who are in prison for rape think it is the dumbest thing that ever happened. It isn't just a miscarriage of justice; they were put in jail for something very little different from what most men do most of the time and call it sex (Mackinnon, 1987: 88).

In arguing that there is such a fine line between the force required to define an encounter as rape and the pressures that are normalised as a part of every-day sexual encounters (Powell, 2010), Mackinnon's view reminds me of the moments in which the young women experienced non-consensual condom removal. Although many of the women struggled to identify this in a frame of sexual harm, they moved through various vocabularies to describe the act and often came to terms with the act as a bodily violation. This is arguably then an experience whereby coercive power, taking Allen's definition of the term, coercion and the power it wields is thus not always obvious, it is clandestine and insidious, so much so that non-consensual condom removal is commonly known, in the circles of men who encourage its practice, as "stealthing" (Brodsky, 2017). Indeed, the regularity with which the women experienced non-consensual condom removal made it a normal part of intercourse, echoing Mackinnon's (1987: 88) view above and in fact, some of the women explained that non-consensual condom removal occurred at such a rate for the simple reason that men enjoyed sex more without a condom, thus potentially becoming "what most men do most of the time and call it sex." Perhaps a reflection of this can be found in the young women speaking to a significant difficulty in considering non-consensual condom removal as rape or sexual assault and instead describing their experience as a violation. Women's struggle to verbalise their experiences of non-consensual condom removal points, not only to the constancy with which it occurs but, also as MacKinnon (1987: 88) posits, that in these kind of situations there might not have been enough violence to take the act beyond the category of "sex." Thus, these experiences might go unreported, or even undiscussed, as they aren't considered rape in a legally provable sense (MacKinnon, 1987: 88). They are instead a normalised part of heterosexual encounters and considered nothing out of the ordinary - something that women tolerate and anticipate. I would add here that not only is it the underreporting of these encounters that is important in this sense, but also the seemingly simple act of labelling an experience rape or sexual assault (Donde et al, 2018).

In this study, we can see, at many points, how the young women often seemed to view male heterosexuality in line with a discourse (which I will go on to explore in more detail later) as being active, uncontrollable and innate to maleness (Hollway, 1984: Powell, 2010: 68). Jen for example offered up her characterisation of men's "two brains", explaining that men "get in the zone" whereby they simply *must* have sex. Later on, in the same chapter, the women shared their concerns of "leading men on" if they consented to certain sexual acts, implying that a male sex drive must be satiated, and sex should be committed to if there is even a mere suggestion that it is to happen. Radical feminists like MacKinnon would arguably view these discourses in keeping with a male-defined sexuality, benefitting the men it is ascribed to by constructing the coercion of women as a normal part of intercourse (Powell, 2010: 68). Coercive power may also work at a more overt level alongside a sense of compulsion, with men compelling young women to engage in sexual activity they do not want or are unsure about, through verbal or physical means (Allen, 2003: 241). Focusing on the verbal here, I am reminded of Hannah's story in which she described how she acquiesced to sex with a man after a party even though she was not comfortable doing so. She explicitly shared that her consent (though given reluctantly) was a result of him reassuring, or arguably pressuring, her and that although she didn't have a condom, her being on the contraceptive pill would – in his opinion - be enough protection. Hannah told the group that in not resisting in having sex with the man in question, she "let him do it", which to me seemed reminiscent of Mackinnon's (1982: 541) subject, verb, object when describing "man fucks woman."

7.2.2 Discursive Power and Foucault

Supplementing ideas of coercive power, I'd like to take a postmodern turn here, looking to a Foucault's concept of power and discourse, which was discussed initially in the theoretical framework chapter of this thesis to help understand the complex ways in which heterosexuality is constantly shaped and constituted in subtle ways as a discourse. If power, for instance, operates in such a way to enable or encourage a certain body of knowledge - for example that it is unfeminine to be a sexually assertive woman (Powell, 2010: 70) - young women in this work (e.g., Hannah) then may have disciplined *themselves*, into accepting as normal their participation in unwanted heterosexual encounters (Powell, 2010: 70). In fact, across all focus groups, the women I spoke to explained that they would avoid refusing sex with plain and clear language out of fear of escalating a sexual scenario to become violent and risky. Rather, they would self-negotiate in a way, allowing certain sexual behaviours to happen but stopping short of coitus

and this seemed to be quite a normalised, disciplined practice of non-consensuality. As Kitzinger and Firth (1999: 294; see also, Powell, 2008) have noted in their work, this phenomenon seems to suggest that women have an implicit, pre-conscious knowledge of the cultural and social rules around negotiating a sexual encounter. The young women's negotiations of condom use is relevant here too. Asking a man to use a condom, or the act of possessing condoms as a woman, is embedded in discursive social meanings. For example, asking for and/or having a condom can require women to flout notions of female sexual passivity (Moran, 2017: 127). And so, as Moran (2017: 127) notes, the discursive resources available within a particular heterosexuality enable certain identities, behaviours, actions and constrain alternatives in the process. This subtler social and cultural form of power then can be seen in the internalisation of various heterosexual discourses, presenting themselves most obviously in the data when the young women grappled with dominant and narrow definitions of the acceptable ways of being sexual.

Iterations of Hollway's (1984; see also, Gavey, 2005) male sexual drive discourse also become relevant here, in particular as the women reported dutifully meeting the needs of male sexual pleasure while denying their own needs. They framed men's sexual wants as uncontrollable, so much so that they knew men would go to considerable lengths to make sure sex happened, even if the women themselves were experiencing pain as a result of sex (I am thinking here specifically of Jen and her boyfriend). Further to this, it was not a question of being able to simply step out and resist the male sexual drive discourse, rather there were pushes and pulls of sexual knowingness and sexual innocence that the young women had to contend with. For example, to set sexual limits was to be marked by pejorative language (Gavey, 2005: 105), exemplified in my focus groups by the use of vocabulary such as: "frigid", "uncool", "bitch" and "leading him on". Meanwhile, other sets of language was used to accuse a woman of being sexually excessive, for example: "whore", "slut", "getting around", "easy" and even being "dirty" as a consequence.

Women then had to contend with embodying what Rubin (1991) calls the "sexually experienced virgin." This kind of policing of women's bodies forced the young women to walk a fine line; they were expected to know how to please men sexually, but not be desiring subjects themselves. There were limits to women's desires, as we saw how possessing too much sexual knowledge and having too many past sexual partners (the arbitrary cut off point seemed to be 10) was suspect. So, disciplinary power worked here not only by punishing women's sexual

behaviour for falling outside of these discursively prescribed norms, but also by rewarding acts esteemed within heterosexual discourse (e.g., satiating the male sexual drive) (Gavey, 2005: 146).

7.2.3 Mediating Power

While the women in this study were clearly engaging with a heterosexualised discourse, at the same time power in heterosex seemed multi-layered and contradictory and thus it is important at this point to explore the avenues whereby women themselves exercised power, albeit partially. With this in mind, I would like to consider the ways in which power in heterosex can be (and has been by the women interviewed in this work), 'mediated' (Allen, 2010). Allen's (2010: 236) use of this term captures how young women can carve out limited agency in their heterosexual encounters and relationships. Structures of power in this study – stemming in part from a coercive, top-down male power as well as a discursive, social and cultural one guiding and setting limits to heterosexual behaviours – did have a clear presence in the women's heterosexual lives, although, some of the young women did allude to subverting, challenging and even revelling in these exercises of power in sophisticated ways. There were many times during the focus groups whereby the young women themselves recognised that their heterosexual lives were unequal, for example they were dismayed that their pleasure, wants and desires were often overlooked during hook-ups. On the other hand, many of them spoke of enjoying being able to have casual sexual encounters and discover what it was that they wanted sexually. This raises the question of whether one can *enjoy* without having agency or power? Perhaps in an intimate encounter, one which we consider to be situated in wider structures of both male and discursive power, sexual enjoyment for women can be powerful but this power will not be exist in a vacuum. After all, despite their enjoyment, the women were acutely aware that this sexual experimentation - and what was deemed too much of it - would come at a price and as a result, they explained how they wanted to be respected, like they considered men to be, as sexually free and choosing individuals.

Nevertheless, some women I spoke to acknowledged that one of the few opportunities afforded to them to shift the balance of power in order to be concentrated in their favour was in the heterosexual space, namely with bringing men sexual pleasure. Take for instance the pop-culture reference used by Laura, that despite the scarcity of women's own orgasm, being the providers of male pleasure created a sense of power for them, a point which the group agreed with intently at the time. This idea, as Laura put it that "you can't come without me bitch!",

featured not only in pop culture but also in social media; Sophia for example recalled seeing social media statuses in which women were unabashed in their heterosexuality through the use of phrases like "I have a dick appointment" and "don't say you fucked me if I didn't finish; I fucked you". Meanwhile, the women expressed that they would support their friends in their heterosexual endeavours, Hannah for example expressed, hypothetically, that if another woman in the group shared that she had sex recently, she would, to quote her: "be like oh my god, tell me everything, you go girl!". Other women arguably demonstrated mediating power in receiving male attention, putting Laura's analysis into practice here. Women like Hannah disrupted the notion that the barometer of 'good' sex for her was reliant on her being brought to orgasm, explaining that she "wouldn't give up male attention just to masturbate". Lydia meanwhile told the group that she enjoyed the increased male attention which she received upon attending university, Hannah recognised this too explaining that she after experiencing it the first time, she soon "wanted more" and Rebecca used loaded language attributing being "chosen" and "picked" by a man after a night out akin to "feeling like a drug".

These moments of power shifts arguably mediate the coercive and disciplinary power described above. Though these might seem quite micro moments of fracture, they are still worthy of interpretation and recognition. It is worth noting that while these claims to power have been somewhat overlooked in the literature, there are some studies which do theorise women's perceptions of power within their heterosexual relationships in the way that the women I spoke to suggested (see Mercer et al, 2013; Macdowall et al, 2013; Marston and Lewis, 2014; Lewis and Marston, 2016; Juvra, 2020). What is interesting, in relation to this sense of empowerment, is the idea that there is, on some level, a form of resistance to the traditional heterosexual discourses (e.g., of the woman as sexually passive), happening. Going back to Foucault (1980; 1987; see also, Bailey, 1993: 109) for a moment here then, the concept of resistance is a key part of his definition of power, since power is regarded as a generative force as well as a restrictive opportunity. Where there is power then, there is resistance (Foucault, 1978 in Allen, 2001: 216). Foucault explains by stating:

> As soon as there's a relationship of power there's a possibility of resistance. We're never trapped by power: it's always possible to modify its hold, in determined conditions following a precise strategy. (Foucault, 1980: 13)

Resistance thus takes the form of counter discourses which produce new knowledge, speak new truths and thus constitute new powers (Ramazanoglu, 1993: 23). These may be 'counter discourses' which oppose dominant truths or 'reverse discourses', e.g., homosexuality (Ramazanoglu, 1993: 23). If power can create pleasures and offer dimensions to being which have not previously existed (Bailey, 1993: 109) are the women in this thesis not engaging in a form of resistance, creating both a counter and a reverse discourse in this thesis? I would argue, yes, that some women did indeed take up subject positions that involved a simultaneous accommodation and resistance of the subject position offered by traditional discourses of feminine heterosexuality. This is epitomised in the women expressing their enjoyment with providing pleasure and in them revealing the gratification that stems from being a sexually desirable subject.

While important to note that their role in this scenario is still one that encapsulates the heteronormative discourse of male pleasure being the priority, of their attractiveness as being fundamental, the women's own feeling of pleasure as a consequence works in such a way as to resist the notion that they are always victims of an oppressive sexual system. At other moments too, the women offer narratives that appear to resist dominant discourses about heterosexuality outright, implying a subjective sense of agency (Allen, 2003: 216, 217) for example, when they explain enjoyment deriving from having causal sex. Perhaps most crucially when we consider resistance in these ways, this agency is conceptualized not as the result of a pre-discursive subject who is able to choose their sexual subjectivity (Allen, 2003: 216, 217), but rather as lying within the constitutive force of discourse (Davies, 1997; Allen, 2003). Thus, as Allen (2003: 217) rightly states, power cannot be total here. Instead, as Hekman (1995: 202, 203) explains, agency that is on display here can be seen as a capacity that flows *from* discursive formations and therefore, subjects (e.g., the young women) find agency within the discursive spaces (traditional feminine heterosexuality) open to them. A view of this kind allows for a critical reading of the women's claims to power as we can consider how traditional feminine heterosexualities and subjectivities are constructed through discourses of a given culture, while at the same time asserting that some, though not all, of these discursive formations allow for some possibilities of agency and resistance (Hekman, 1995: 202, 203).

7.3 Colluding with Postfeminism?

Yet, the kind of heterosexual power considered here, as well as the Foucauldian analysis of resistance, may be regarded as mired in neoliberal discourses of empowerment, choice and agency such that the young women are potentially operating within the boundaries of a constraining postfeminist discourse (Doull and Sethna, 2011: 95). The critical question becomes whether Hannah's you-go-girl feminism constitutes a real and true expression of heterosexual power (Doull and Sethna, 2011: 95). And whether, for example, prioritising male pleasure (and feeling a sense of enjoyment as a result of it) actually *continues* to conform to and reproduce the norms of heterosexuality as opposed to disrupting them (Moran, 2017: 128). I would like to build on these ideas here to explore how we can interpret the young women's experiences of mediated access to heterosexual power alongside a reading of neoliberalism and postfeminism.

Postfeminism is an entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas, based on assumptions that suggest there is no need for feminism (McRobbie, 2004; Moran, 2017: 123; Gill and Scharff, 2013). Emphasised here are the gains of individualism, choice and empowerment which can be achieved in relation to commodification and consumerism. In the case of this research though, this is perhaps exemplified by Hannah's you-go-girl statement, which can be seen as the commodification of so-called girl-power feminism, and these "gains" are achieved via heterosexuality and hyperfeminnity (Moran, 2017: 123).

Thus we can potentially see how, in their feeling a sense of power and enjoyment, some of the young women in featured in this research may in fact be speaking to what Rosalind Gill (2007) referred to as a postfeminist sensibility. A postfeminist sensibility speaks to a shift from objectification to subjectification as well as a resexualisation of women's bodies (namely women who fit the heteronormative ideal of being beautiful, slim, white and desiring sex with men) (Moran, 2017: 123; Gill, 2007; Gill and Scharff, 2011). This subjectification alters from it being done by young men to young women, to young women objectifying themselves for the benefit of a male gaze. Postfeminism here can be understood as part of neoliberalism, given the latter insists on the individual as a rational, self-reflexive agent able to exercise free choice and personal responsibility (Gonick et al, 2009; Evans et al, 2010; Moran, 2017). This results in a cultural narrative which is signified by autonomy and denies the existence of structural constraints, rendering inequalities defined by race, class and gender as invisible (Gonick et al, 2009; Evans et al, 2010; Moran, 2017). By extension then, girls and women are thus, under this

view, the ideal rational actors who have succeeded in reinventing themselves as liberated, contemporary sexual women who can claim empowerment (Gonick et al, 2009; Evans et al, 2010; Moran, 2017).

I am reminded of the relevance of McRobbie's (2007: 733; see also, Gonick et al, 2009) construction of the postfeminist masquerade here, wherein she describes how consumer culture negotiates a complicated terrain by inviting young women to overturn the old sexual double standard and emulate the assertive and hedonistic styles of sexuality often associated with young men. This thinking would place the young women in this thesis as potentially leaning-in to a kind of faux heterosexual power. In postfeminist cultures, the young women's display of sexual practice and sexual agency has become normative, replacing ideas of innocence and virtue as the commodity that young women are required to offer in the heterosexual marketplace (Evans et al, 2010; Gill, 2007; Gonick et al, 2009). In other words, in referring to the women as empowered agents and declaring a form of heterosexual power here, I may be reproducing what Gill (2012) refers to as, a 'postfeminist packaging', which obscures the underlying sexism present in the young women's experiences. If we consider postfeminism and neoliberalism alongside one another, perhaps we can understand how empowerment has come to be a normative feature of contemporary heterosexuality for young women, shorthand for a commodification of heterosexuality which, in actual fact, represents a narrow representation of what is sexy according to a male gaze (Tolman, 2012 in Moran, 2017: 125, 126). The women in this work might then be reproducing male-centred heteronormative discourses which privilege and play to a male audience, what Holland and colleagues (1998) have termed the now ubiquitous, male-in-the-head.

Additionally, the words of the women I spoke to may be considered to be resonating with what Phillips (2005: 125) calls a 'pleasing woman discourse', whereby their social worth is defined by their desirability to young men. Under this view, Hannah, Rebecca and Lydia - as well as many other women in the groups who agreed with their statements – can be studied as capitalising on their ability to arouse and attract men - one of the few areas where they are deemed successful (Phillips, 2005: 125). Arguably, with little access to genuine power, being a desirable object offered the women a subjective sense of control in their sexual encounters and the young women are thus, in part, constrained as this power becomes circular (in that it continues to reflect and promote the sexual needs of men) (McRobbie, 2009; Harris and Dobson, 2015; Phillips, 2005).

But does this empirical research *simply* demonstrate how young women mobilize narratives of choice and personal autonomy to articulate and make sense of their actions? (Kelly et al, 2016). As Moran (2017: 130) has put it, it is true that in relation to young women's heterosexuality, it seems that the message is still that their desirability, appearance and ability to be sexually pleasing to men is consistently tied to their value. It is with little doubt that postfeminist and neoliberal ideologies are central to this messaging, in that what might usually be considered sexist is repackaged and presented through notions of women *choosing* to have sex a certain way, to talk about sex a certain way - what Sophia called "a dick appointment" for example – to behave in a certain way (Moran, 2017). After all, the group of Hannah, Sophia and Laura all considered themselves, when asked, to be feminists, without question. The question becomes, were they simply using their feminist freedom to choose to re-embrace a form of traditional femininity? (Gill, 2009).

Though I recognise that these postfeminist and neoliberal analyses are extremely valid and may well be illustrative of the women's choices in relation to this research, I am at the same time, concerned that these theories might constrict and suffocate the very experiences and reflections I attempt to respect. It seems that, in validating a framing that is critical of women's sexual choices, we are giving up the ability to respect such choices and instead, constructing women as victimised objects. I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that it seems that the women I spoke to as part of this research were reflecting on the nuances of their heterosexual experiences and, in that sense, I think it unfair to construct them as *either* totally free sexual agents *or* victims of a false consciousness at the hands of neoliberalism and the patriarchy. To me, they were both of these things all at once and it is important to recognise the contradiction and complexity in these subject positions. Young women's sexual realities are always changing, moving between complex operations of power in society. Doull and Sethna's (2011: 107) view rings true here, that as researchers in this space we ought to simultaneously note that there is an ongoing impact of male and discursive power in women's heterosexual lives but *at the same time* there exist avenues to mediate this power through young women's own experiences of power in their heterosexual relationships.

How do we move, then, beyond continually negating women's own positive experiences of accessing power through heterosexuality without considering such women to be duped by patriarchal, neoliberal, postfeminist forces? Certainly, the power that the women report

exercising here can be considered limited, but this does not take away from the fact that these women certainly felt sexually powerful. I agree firmly with Doull and Sentha (2011: 106) that rather than criticising the choices women make here (and thus ignoring their expressions of positive power), we should be looking to question the choices *offered* to women to be powerful in their heterosexual lives, in turn offering up a theory of power that recognises the interpersonal expression of power while evaluating its scope within surrounding structures.

7.3.1 Which Women can Claim Empowerment?

However, as has already been mentioned in this thesis, considering the contextual factors of the lives of the young women in this work is essential when analysing ideas of sexual agency. As I have stated, the majority of the women featured in this research identified as white and though I did not ask them to disclose their social class, a considerable number were members of a sorority, an institution which charges its members anywhere between $1,300 to upwards of $4,000 in dues per semester. From this, we can infer that the majority of the women would have indeed identified as middle class. This becomes particularly important, and problematic, when we consider that there are significant concerns as to *which* women have the privilege of accessing and making use of these discourses of active sexual subjectivity.

Past research using a class perspective has examined the ways in which women negotiate gendered and sexualised constructions of working-class femininity through the notions of respectability (Skeggs, 1997, 2005; Phipps, 2009; Moran, 2017). Studies have also documented how black women contended with stigmatising connotations of their sexual subjectivity as underminingly hypersexualised (a discourse which cannot be disentangled from its historical context of slavery) – a phenomenon which has been presented in various forms of media, for example music videos (Collins, 2004; Emmerson, 2002; Weekes, 2004; Marshall, 1994). Latina sexuality is, meanwhile, often characterized in the literature according to women's passivity, selflessness, and what many researchers refer to as marianismo, the sacrificing of self for the good of the family (Juarez and Kerl, 2003: 11; Everett, 2000; Garciá and Torres, 2009). Scholars have, however, critiqued these characterisations of Latina sexuality, arguing that such dominant representations not only narrowly portray Latina sexuality as inherently negative but also assume that modern white sexuality has progressively become more liberated and is assumed as the healthy, right way to be sexual (Juarez and Kerl, 2003: 8; Garciá and Torres, 2009).

In *Mapping the Margins*, Kimberle Crenshaw expands on her, now extremely popular, framing of intersectionality; she writes:

> Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. And so, when the practices expound identity as woman or person of colour as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of colour to a location that resists telling (Crenshaw, 1991: 1242).

To advance the telling of the location which she describes, Crenshaw (1991: 1242, 1243) explores race and gender dimensions of violence against women of colour – an intersection of identities which, in her view, contemporary feminist and antiracist discourses have failed to consider. Crenshaw (1991: 1246) details observing the "dynamics of structural intersectionality" through fieldwork on battered women's shelters in the minority communities of Los Angeles. The women who sought protection at said shelters were unemployed, underemployed and many of them poor (Crenshaw, 1991: 1246). The shelters meanwhile worked to address not only the violence inflicted, but also to confront the complex and routine forms of domination that converge in these women's lives, domination which would hinder their ability to create alternative life opportunities:

> Many women of colour, for example, are burdened by poverty, childcare responsibilities, and the lack of job skills. These burdens largely the consequence of gender and class oppression, are then compounded by the racially discriminatory employment and housing practices women of colour often face, as well as by the disproportionately high unemployment among people of colour that makes battered women of colour less able to depend on the support of friends and relatives for temporary shelter (Crenshaw, 1991: 1245, 1246).

Crenshaw (1991: 1246) concludes that where systems of race, gender, and class domination converge, intervention strategies based solely on the experiences of women who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be of limited help to women who because of race and class face different obstacles. Thus, in a framing of this kind, i.e., of the intersections of race and gender, Crenshaw (1991: 1243) highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when "considering how the social world is constructed." More recently still, Patricia Hill Collins (2019) has described intersectionality as working in multiple registers, recognising

the significance of the structural and social arrangements of power and noting that it is how individual and/or group experiences reflect these structural and social intersections.

In relation to this thesis then, it should always be borne in mind that women who are not young, white, middle class or heterosexual can and have been excluded from such the sexual subjectivity discourses discussed and instead, forced to contend with different and intersected sexualised messages that are not only gendered but also classed and racialised (Moran, 2017: 115; Gill, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991). Subordination, of a sexualised nature, which intersects in this way is not, in Crenshaw's (1991: 1249) view, intentionally produced but in fact, it is the consequence of the imposition of one burden that interacts with pre-existing vulnerabilities to create yet other dimensions of disempowerment. Suffice to say at this point then, that the picture of women's lived heterosexual realities in this thesis would be very different if explored with a sample more diverse in identity. Thus, research only reveals part of the picture for a small group of, arguably privileged, women.

7.4 Working on the Self

Moving on from notions of power and their relevance in interpreting the data pertaining to this research, I'd like to turn to analyse the themes developed in the previous chapter regarding the young women engaging forms of self-work. Using the concept of emotion work specifically here, we can examine more deeply the ways in which the women in this thesis spoke of certain techniques used to operate on themselves (internally and externally), and on their sexual partners to subsequently manage certain sexual scenarios. Emotion work will be conceptualised to begin this section, followed by safety work and sex work, the latter two concepts which are extensions of the emotion work.

7.4.1 Emotion Work

There is extensive literature which considers emotion work as it exists in the private sphere of personal relationships, as reflected upon in chapter two of this thesis. The distribution of this work is highly gendered, especially in the context of heterosexual relationships, with the girl or woman taking on the bulk of the management of the relationship and emotions within it (Holford, 2019: 74). Some of this research uses the concept of emotion work as an important reason for women to find difficulty in refusing men's sexual demands and engaging in sexual encounters they do not want (Firth and Kitzinger, 1998; Cairns, 1993; Duncombe and

Marsden, 1993, 1995, 1996; Elliott and Umberson, 2008). Extending the work done in these studies, we too can apply the concept of emotion work analytically to the data in this research. The women interviewed in this work spoke of a precarity in refusing sex and setting their own boundaries. They were burdened in a sense by the expectation that it was their responsibility to take care of men's emotions as to avoid causing distress and hurt, which would render them vulnerable to sexual violence and coercion (Firth and Kitzinger, 1998). This expressed concern with the emotional needs of young men was evident in the women sharing that men have in the past become aggressive when the women had firmly articulated that they did not want to have sex (Beth for example). Women like Jess explained that men had "not let her leave" their apartment upon hearing of her unwillingness to have sex, while we saw how Sarah, in an attempt to "not make things awkward" tolerated unwanted sexual touching from a man she was on a date with.

As has been mentioned, arguably the young women were regulating their sexual availability in a sense as they consented to allow only *some* sexual acts (e.g., touching and foreplay) to take place. Meanwhile, dealing with the escalation of a sexual encounter had to be done with certain skill, finding a "natural way" to shut sex down, so as to not "lead men on too far". Such hyperawareness of their own movements, acceptances and rejections during sex caused the women to reveal that at times it was "hard to enjoy" sex. In these sexual negotiations it is the women who feel responsible for their partners not feeling negative consequences and sometimes the women shared that the cost of this was to engage in sex that they did not want (e.g., Piper, Hannah and Sarah), subjugating their own feelings to those of men (Firth and Kitzinger, 1998). Arguably, the emotion work of refusing sex has become so burdensome that, for the women, consenting to unwanted or undesired sex was considered a trade-off, chosen as an act of emotional altruism (Firth and Kitzinger, 1998). This is so much so that at times the women presented themselves as part of a sexual encounter whereby sex was being performed *on them* (e.g., Hannah's expression of "I let him do it"). Managing men's emotions then seemed a crucial part of heterosex, as Nicole said: "we have all either been in that situation, or we know someone who has been taken advantage of, those situations where guys turn kind of scary so what comes to your mind is: 'what if I say no and he gets really mad, or he doesn't want to talk to me again or what if I say no and he does something awful". Not taking part in sex hazarded exposure to, and fear of, violence - what Gavey (1993) calls heterosexual coercion. In sharing these experiences of, what I understand to be self/emotion work, we can see how the women construct and depict men as powerful, unpredictable and quick to anger if sex – which they

are, arguably, perceived to be entitled to – is not to happen (Firth and Kitzinger, 1998). Women seem to perform this emotion work not only to maintain the couple relationship itself as Duncombe and Marsden suggest (1995), but to also preserve their safety and, perhaps most interestingly, to avoid being disparaged (e.g., "what if he doesn't talk to me again" "what if he spreads rumours about me?").

So, it seems the young women are grappling with two forms of emotion work: first, having to navigate refusing sex in a way that curbs men's anger and thus avoids violence, and second, the emotion work required to dodge the looming personal degradation – via expressions and talk which works to reproduce heteronormative discourses around acceptable female sexuality (e.g., chastising a woman a slut or whore if she is *too* sexually active and shaming her for being frigid if she is unwilling to have sex) – that can manifest as a result of this refusal. With this in mind, I agree to an extent with Duncombe and Marsden (1996: 222) here that women can be seen as located within a conflicting range of discourses. However, Duncombe and Marsden (1996: 222) note that women "actively locate themselves" and I disagree that this is an active effort, rather they don't have much choice but to simply accept the situation. It should come as little surprise that discourses which construct men (and their sexual drive) as powerful and uncontrollable and women and their heterosexuality as passive and ever-pleasing, should work to bring about a variety of symptoms of gender inequality in heterosex (e.g., the women's "what if's" described above, women's sexual compliance as a consequence of being unable to refuse sex and women enduring sexual pain) (Duncombe and Marsden, 1996; Rubin, 1991; Hollway, 1984).

7.4.2 Safety Work

In the previous chapter, I showed how the women spoke openly of the nuanced ways in which they would negotiate sexual encounters that they felt uncomfortable with or, in their view, had potential to become dangerous. In situations such as these, some women had well-organised strategies in which they would text friends codewords to signal that they needed help. Other women, meanwhile, shared that they had faked phone calls to family members in an effort to thwart potential sexual violence. On the other hand, and what I'd like to pay close attention to here, is the young women who revealed engaging in less concrete plans and more kinds of self-negotiations as a method for avoiding sexual harms. What I mean here is ways of rejecting men's sexual advances without, as many of the women put it, having to say no. Through an extension of the concept of invisible work (Fishman, 1978) into the realm of violence against women, Liz Kelly and Vera-Gray (2020; see also, Kelly, 2012; Vera-Gray, 2016) suggest a that

a clear form of work can be seen when analysing the efforts which women go to in order to stop violence from happening. Kelly and Vera-Gray (2020: 2) define this concept as safety work, describing the strategic planning that women and girls undertake in responding to, avoiding and/or coping with men's violence, though the term safety work is often used to describe work undertaken as a response to sexual harassment in public spaces. The notion in the case of this thesis applies to the more private, interpersonal sexual encounters. As part of safety work then, women learn to quietly make changes and continually evaluate situations (Vera-Gray, 2016). Such work, repeated over time, becomes habitual: it is absorbed into the body as a kind of hidden labour (Kelly and Vera-Gray, 2020: 7; Vera-Gray, 2016), hence the linkages to Pamela Fishman's (1978) study which developed ideas of invisible work (otherwise known as work considered for women only).

Across my focus groups the women spoke to sexual situations where they would "look at the clock" and wonder when would be a "natural way to pull out" of the encounter. A frequent concern was that the act of saying no to a man clearly interested in, and prepared for, sex would be too severe, some women mentioned that this rejection may cause men to "do something awful" (Nicole). For example, Beth shared how she felt a real "fear around sex" because of past violent experiences, she portrayed these as episodes where men would "lash out" and "get mad". In line with a theory of safety work then, this routine vigilance that the young women describe, the inability to reject men out of fear of violence, can be considered a bodily strategy used to limit intrusions and designed to minimise risk (Kelly and Vera-Gray, 2020: 5). Other women like Lydia and Terri, acted carefully in dealing with the opposing demands of unwanted sexual encounters, rationalising and allowing some sexual behaviour in an attempt to bring the sex to a close safely. In the case of Sarah and Terri, they disclosed giving men partial sexual access to their bodies, trading their freedom in order to feel safe and thus treading an impossibly fine line (Kelly and Vera-Gray, 2020: 5). In response to men's sexual intrusion then, the women can be described as being on guard and even if men's violence had never been experienced it was always a *possibility*. At the same time though, the young women would dismiss at times the harm caused, often under the pretence that nothing-is-really-happening and thus any unwanted behaviour can be tolerated (echoing Kelly and Radford's 1990 study *Nothing Really Happened*). This seemed to be the case most obviously when Sarah described that upon being subject to unwanted touching from a man she was on a date with, she consciously detached herself from the situation, reassuring herself that "everything was fine" that she could "deal with it for five minutes" all in an effort to avoid "making things awkward".

Both emotion and safety work are arguably happening in Sarah's case here, the former as Sarah hints at working on the self; shaping, as well as suppressing feeling (Hochschild, 1979: 561) in the scenario she describes. Women, like Sarah, thus learn then to adapt their behaviour and movements, habitually limiting their own freedom to prevent, avoid, or dismiss what they experience as ordinary (Vera-Gray, 2018), working on themselves in the process. Over time, the repetition of this behaviour renders the work it required to uphold it invisible; what begins as work is now a common-sense, accepted method to ensure safety, as the young women in this thesis were acutely aware that male anger as a consequence from prohibited sex with women is simply the "nature of men" (Nicole).

As part of safety work, it is common-sense for Hannah to have sex with a man in her own apartment rather than going to his home, or for Terri to be "one step ahead of the guy" to weigh-up what acts would be tolerable, and which would be crossing the self-imposed line. We can see too how safety work produces a set of gendered expectations in keeping with some of the heteronormative discourses discussed previously in this chapter, all of which have a huge amount of influence over the women's actions and beliefs (Kelly and Vera-Gray, 2020, 5). For example, the women spoke here about the reasons for adopting alternative, safety work methods to ensure their wellbeing, namely because being a sexually assertive woman and rejecting men's sexual advances would be akin to "being a bitch". On the other hand, to be overly suggestive in their actions, to consent to *too* much and imply that sex would happen despite wanting quite the opposite could be interpreted as "leading him on too far". If the women in this research are weighing up their concerns about being able to set their own sexual boundaries alongside their trepidations around men's perceptions of them, we can see how safety work, when performed unsuccessfully, can be perceived as women having done something wrong (e.g., leading him on) or being something wrong (e.g., a bitch). (Kelly and Vera-Gray, 2020: 5). Women in this thesis are thus caught in a double bind in that the safety work they do is not only invisible, but they are also blamed in the inevitable event that their attempts at managing the situation fail (Vera-Gray, 2018).

Arguably then, the women here are complexly drawing on lessons of the past and looking to the future in order to establish how to act in the present by assessing consequences and adjusting their responses (Vera-Gray, 2018). If we are to interpret these women's experiences as acts of safety work, it ought to be pointed out that they are complex. What I mean by this is that,

certainly safety work is oppressive and constraining in nature, but at the same time, we cannot ignore that the women at times report navigating these unwanted encounters with an element of discernment, mitigating risk as a result. However, as soon as I analyse safety work from that perspective, I am reminded of Vera-Gray (2016) when she rightly notes that there is something distinctly uncomfortable about claiming women's safety work, which so clearly decreases their freedom as we have seen, as an expression of women's agency.

Perhaps what ought to be recognised instead is that women's safety work in this thesis can be a sophisticated, almost highly skilled negotiation. However, this kind of work will thus always be firmly located within an understanding, not only as Kelly and Vera-Grey claim, of public space as gendered, but of the private, sexual space as gendered too. Though it is deeply unfortunate, and enraging, that self-work of this kind is necessary to preserve safety, it is clear that the young women in this research described an astutely developed sense of their sexual environment, as well as the men within it, sharing that they respond to intrusive men through a calculation of escalation, creating a template of risk to evaluate the safest course of action (Vera-Gray, 2018).

7.4.3 Sex Work

A final form of work that is relevant here is Duncombe and Marsden's, as well as Cacchioni's, development of the concept 'sex work'. Originally mooted by Duncombe and Marsden (1996), sex work in this case is used as a way of conceptualizing women's engagement with the rationalization, improvement and mastery of sexual pleasure in personal sexual relationships. Thus, by analogy with emotion work considered above, in doing sex work individuals manage their emotions according to rules of how sex ought to be experienced and this is done to try to attain or simulate (for themselves and/or their partners) a sexual fulfilment they would not feel spontaneously (Hochschild, 1983; Duncombe and Marsden, 1996: 221). Under this description then, perhaps the most striking and obvious form of sexual work women engage in revolves around faking orgasm. In relation to this thesis, across the interview data it was clear that many women would regularly fake orgasm: they expressed they would "fake all the time" and lie to their sexual partner that they had reached orgasm although they had not. Other women didn't report faking orgasm themselves but rather, they were aware that women regularly engaged in this kind of practice, explaining they "knew girls that fake 'em."

Duncombe and Marsden (1996: 236) note that arguing that the performance of sex work is probably widespread risks implying that sex is normally difficult, distasteful or alienating. In

fact, sex work – much like 'regular' work - may be either fulfilling or distasteful, depending upon the relational context in which it is performed (Duncombe and Marsden, 1996: 236). I accept Duncombe and Marsden's (1996: 236) point here though I do not totally agree, after all, are we not, at least in part, performing all the time as part of the nature of social relational interactions? We don't necessarily perform because an interaction is difficult. For instance, for the women in this study, faking orgasm seemed to be performed in an effort to placate the men they were having sex with, some expressed for example "you don't wanna feel like you are taking up too much of their time", or that they would simply "give up" because of a sense that orgasm was unlikely to occur.

At times this appeasement seemed to be bound within a pressure of sorts as the women explained that if they were to tell their partner they had not had an orgasm, the response would usually be "how much longer?" or "can we be done soon?" Interestingly though, the women alluded to the idea that faking orgasm – and thus their sex work – took place as a result of "ignorance" with regards to how "women work" and how they can be pleasured sexually. Thus, when situated in the context of work, faking orgasm can be seen as functioning as a form of women's sex work, particularly as women's sexuality is seen as oppositional to men's 'natural' heterosexuality, and under this view, women's orgasms are considered arduous, an act that takes time and is to be worked on (Roberts, 1995: 528).

Not only this, but the act of sex work in this case may be viewed as a way to *compensate* for men's ignorance. Indeed, the women in this thesis and across the focus groups, commented that they believed men "weren't educated" and "were ignorant" about women's pleasure and their bodies (Tara and Jen). The question becomes, what would be the consequences of the young women pointing out this ignorance? Would illuminating the young men's shortfalls in this regard risk retaliation from men and in turn threaten the women's safety? Perhaps then the cost would be too great, given that the women felt they often could not always voice their sexual wants and needs.

Further to this and along these lines of prioritising orgasm (fake or otherwise), some of the women expressed that even with the knowledge of the orgasm gap (Armstrong et al, 2012) in their sexual encounters (e.g., that sex would be unlikely to feature their own orgasm) they would still seek to have sex despite this. They justified this in wanting to make men "feel good" despite acknowledging they themselves would only "feel good-ish", to quote Hannah. To perform

pleasure in such a way as Hannah, and the other women did, begs the question whether women care, at times, more about offering their male partners orgasm and thus taking part in sex work that functions to prioritise men's sexual drive. This pleasure aspect of sex work crops up in at other points in the discussions I had with women, as some unquestionably mentioned that their partners pleasure mattered more than their own. Some women, for example quite plainly stated that it brought them pleasure to give their partner pleasure (Lydia), Rebecca spoke to a "duty" to be the provider of their partner's sexual enjoyment. Others, like Jen used more severe language, explaining that she felt she had been "groomed" to give men sexual pleasure, she shared that it was almost her "job as a woman" to neglect her own sexual wants and focus on her partners'.

Although I oppose Cacchioni's (2007) understanding of this sex work as "unacknowledged effort" by the self, it seems to be quite the opposite for some women in this thesis, like Jen for example, who recognised how, in her own words, "messed up it is" that she emphases male pleasure so significantly. Nevertheless, the women's expressions resonate with Cacchioni's (2007: 201) depiction of the ways in which women engage in sex work as the "continuing monitoring" that women devote to managing their own and their partners' sexual desires and practices. As is the case with emotion work, sex work takes place in the context of an interpersonal balance of power, which in such exchanges of heterosex, tends to be tilted toward men (Duncombe and Marsden, 1996: 223; Cacchioni, 2007). We can see these imbalances of power emerge when women like Tara speak to a "pressure" to make "men feel good". As with safety and emotion work, this is perhaps in part because when such sex work ceases to be done, the women reported a fear of ostracization; being called a "bad lay" or told that they had "not put enough effort" even being shunned through hurtful gossip (e.g., that men will share disparaging sexual stories with their male friends resulting in the women having concerns that they will be considered "weird" or having something "wrong with them"). Nonetheless, even when sex does not feel like work or oppression in such an obvious sense as it might here, it may well be a case of "feelings matching the feeling rules" (e.g. the social norms which tell us what, when and where to feel, for how long, and how strong our emotions ought to be), and thus women are playing by the rules in that faking orgasm and prioritising male pleasure is anticipated and accepted, part of the everyday, unchallenged sex work within heterosex (Duncombe and Marsden, 1996: 237; Hochschild, 1979; 1983).

Yet, the question must be asked (again) whether emotion/sex work of this kind can be fulfilling? In focusing on relations of power and inequality are we ignoring a space in which young women choose to and enjoy engaging in "the labour of love'" as Cacchioni (2007: 315) calls it. Contextualising then, it is certainly true that some of the women I spoke to described what might be considered a form of 'positive' sex work. The young women for example, who expressed a feeling of enjoyment at being the providers of pleasure to their sexual partners. Cacchioni's (2007) idea of discipline work within a broader frame of sex work rings true here, particularly the notion that women can and do change their mental and physical sexual response to the standard practices of heterosexuality.

This more optimistic view of sex work can be seen in the women speaking to a feeling of empowerment by "being able to choose" what satisfied them - or in Vanessa's case, in changing the conditions of a dissatisfying hook-up to be one that was more fulfilling by advocating for her own sexual wants. Nicole on the other hand, rejected the view that orgasm was the gold-standard and instead spoke of an emotional closeness that she felt during sex with her partner that she valued deeply over her own orgasm. As Cacchioni (2007: 315) notes then, it is possible here that the women constructed and reaffirmed their sexual identities through sex work in addition to relishing in the process of exploring their sexuality and sexual encounters on, supposedly, their own terms.

7.5 Conclusion

In using both the theoretical concepts of power and emotion work, I hope to have offered an uncovering of the nuanced inequalities within heterosexual relations. In analysing the data through these frames, it can be argued that multiple layers of power and work permeate women's heterosexual lives and that, at times, there are real costs to women because of this (Fahs and Swank, 2017). For example, we see the young women's struggles and complications in assessing whether they feel exploited or violated by certain acts (e.g., consenting to unwanted sex and experiencing non-consensual condom removal) or whether these episodes are simply normalised occurrences in heterosex, regarded as 'just the way things are' and thus exploitations (of power or work) no longer (Fahs and Swank, 2017). At the same time though it seems that the women in some ways feel compensated, we see how gratification derives from the act of giving pleasure, as well as how feelings of liberation can stem from engaging in sexual experimentation, discovering pleasures and desires. Ideas of this latter kind potentially work to fracture the traditional discourses around women's heterosexuality (Fahs and Swank, 2017; Cacchioni, 2007). However, the overall picture suggests that when concepts of work and power are used to analyse the complex interplay of women's desires and actions, there are discursive, structural as well as contextual issues at play such as, the backdrop of traditional heterosexual discourses shaping sexual practices and young men's sexual coercion, neither of which can be ignored.

Thus, there are significant complexities that reveal themselves when we analyse the data through these frameworks; women claim empowerment but are restricted by traditional discourses of what it means to be a heterosexual woman. The women assert a sense of enjoyment in relation to giving pleasure and yet fear subjectification of a sexual double standard should they explore *too much* pleasure of their own. All the while, they firmly acknowledge these binds and yet still they exist within them. To an extent then, these fissures (between the enjoyment of giving pleasure and the fear of the sexual double standard) go unchallenged and unchanged just as they did in literature and research on the topic of young women's heterosexuality from the mid 90's (Holland et al, 1998). Women's heterosexuality as explored in this thesis can perhaps be seen as something of a complex contradiction: young women have certainly made progress in that they are able to speak of their own sexual pleasure confidently, but intricate constraints of old, e.g., acting out these pleasures with a partner, still remain.

Chapter Eight – Concluding Chapter

8.1 Concluding the Research

When research—of the kind conducted in this thesis—reaches a conclusion, there comes an opportunity to look forward and pose questions. I often contemplate now, 3 years on from embarking on my fieldwork, having spoken to women about their heterosexual experiences with men and having analysed these reflections in detail: what would I tell the women about my own understanding of their heterosexual lives? Though I want to exercise some caution here in that I do not want this question to be read as the outside researcher (i.e., me), being the expert on these women's lives. This is far from the case and rather, the question I am grappling with here is what is my understanding of the women's stories that *I* would reflect back to *them.* Perhaps most importantly still, what would their thoughts be regarding my understanding of their experiences? Though I can not answer the latter question at the time of writing, I'd like to bring the thesis to a close by indulging in the former two questions here.

8.1.1 Wider Contributions and Considering the Research Questions

Before doing so, however, it is important to situate this thesis in terms of the wider contribution to knowledge that it makes and to consider the research questions. The overarching aim of this thesis has been to shed light on how college-aged women navigate their heterosexual experiences with men. Relatedly, this research has sought to answer the following questions stemming from this overarching aim; firstly, whether young women are able to exercise a sense of agency or empowerment in their heterosexual lives, secondly, how young women cope with unpleasant sexual scenarios and thirdly, what theoretical and conceptual tools can be applied to the young women's stories to better understand them.

Beginning with the first question, this thesis has, in part, supported and mirrored findings of existing research on women's heterosexuality, particularly if we consider that the young women interviewed as part of this research still adhered to restrictive ideologies dictating appropriate 'feminine' heterosexual behaviour. As part of this, the young women in this thesis reported prioritising male pleasure - this was often understood to be unstoppable and needing to be urgently satiated - over of their own. The women were also forced to contend with heterosexual double standards and the archaic view as to the number of people it was, and was not,

acceptable for them to have sex with. Engaging in too much of this causal, non-committal sex was to act out of the parameters of conventional heterofemininity and sexual shaming would often ensue. At times too, the young women's preferences for condom use were sometimes sacrificed as carrying condoms (for women) represented being sexually active, thus going against the normative constructions of acceptable feminine behaviour.

As outlined in the introductory chapter, I interpret many of these studies on women's heterosexuality to paint quite a pessimistic picture and while this thesis does go into detail as to how the young women are constrained in their experience of heterosexuality, it does too present a more nuanced, perhaps optimistic view. This is particularly true if we consider the first research question, and in answering it, note that there are avenues for women to experience pleasure and power in heterosex. It is acknowledging these experiences as avenues (or at least starting points) for change and giving voice to them that sets this particular research apart from those which construct women's heterosexual experiences as overwhelmingly negative. For example, young women were able to carve out some, albeit individualised, moments of empowerment within these oppressive structures. The ability to mediate these restrictive ideologies occurred namely when the young women disclosed feeling a sense of gratification and pleasure as a direct consequence of male sexual attention. This attention was reflected upon in a positive way; it was not construed as demeaning or oppressive but rather, it was complexly celebrated as the women expressed enjoyment at being able to please men sexually. Further to this, some young women carved out agency in experimenting sexually and discovering the things that they found sexually pleasurable. Other women, meanwhile, recounted empowerment and agency developing from putting a stop to the unpleasant sexual relationships wherein they felt dominated and unequal to their partner.

Crucially though, this thesis opens up a discussion of the more contemporary heterosexual struggles that matter to young women and in my view, it is these which have not been fully captured by the current literature. I will pause here to explore in more detail some of these more frequent and far-reaching, everyday struggles that the women were forced to contend with in their heterosexual encounters as illuminated in my own findings.

An aspect of heterosexual relations not considered in past research, is that at times the women's language was used in a way to point to the need to maintain something of a coherent self-narrative. For example, the women exclaimed that if they weren't brought to orgasm, they

'fucked' a man as opposed to the other way around. Additionally, some women reflected upon the crucial role they played in bringing men to orgasm in heterosex, expressing that men "can't come" without them. It is this extensive use of strategies of language – and self-narrative – here which is unique to this study. The young women are conscious of what it means to not have pleasure in a sexual encounter or relationship; they are aware of the inequalities that exist in heterosex (where pleasure is concerned) and that knowledge in itself is powerful. At the same time though, women are using this language discursively (in that they are creating a story about what is happening) to compensate for some material failings in the power that they have. I thus consider this type of language and narrative crafting an attempt by the young women, at dealing with the differences in power relations between them and young men; although the women were somewhat subordinated (as their sexual interests were not centred) they consequently tried to grasp at some sense of agency.

In addition to this distinctive upkeep of self-narrative, the young women in this thesis spoke in great detail of enduring and tolerating unpleasant but ambiguous sexual encounters. Uncovering this somewhat hidden area of women's heterosexual experience has implications for how we talk about sex as it has not been fully explored in the existing literature. This thesis attempts to fill this gap, and simultaneously answers the second and third research questions together, by making sense of these kind of unpleasant heterosexual encounters and why it is that they are tolerated, by looking to the theoretical framework of emotion work and building on the research of Arlie Hochschild. The young women in this thesis report dealing with these unwanted, unpleasant sexual situations by way of a myriad of methods. These included: hatching complex plans to receive fake phone calls from family members so as to put a stop to the sexual encounter; vowing never to go to a man's apartment; and subsequently engaging in sex only in their own homes in fear of their safety in an unknown place. The women spoke too, of a complex self-negotiation of sorts wherein, during unwanted sex, they would consent to *some* elements of the sexual encounter. The women would move themselves into physical positions, endure touching and certain sexual acts, all in an effort to bring the encounter to a close in the safest way possible. Coping with these unpleasant, unwanted situations thus involved the women working on themselves, and managing their own emotions, as well as those of others. This thesis takes the view that the women adopted this method so as to find the most inoffensive way to end sex, out of fear of the reputational consequences that could come with rejecting men sexually and because of the more in-the-moment costs to their safety (e.g., angering men should the women refuse sex).

8.1.2 Ruminating the Resolutions

How do we go about resolving, the conditions that cause women to experience the tolerated, unwanted encounters which they speak of here? Perhaps the reason that we aren't able to fully grapple with these more ambiguous experiences that this thesis uncovers is a consequence of the binary, on/off discourses of sexual consent (Matthews, 2018). We are told that women ought to 'just say no' in order to reject unwanted sex, but this thesis shows that this is not always possible for women. In fact, the opposite is true, women in this research spoke of consenting to certain acts, enduring unwanted experiences as they were unable to 'just say no' in fear of their own safety. More often still, the idea is touted that consent should be enthusiastic, affirmative and even sometimes sexy – a freely and easily given 'yes' signals the ideal heterosexual encounter. And yet, as we have seen in this thesis, young women's heterosexual lives are complex; an enthusiastic yes to sex might not be possible, or necessary to constitute *good* sex. What I mean by this, is that when describing the enjoyable, fulfilling sex that they had, the young women did not suggest that it was good sex because they said yes, because they consented – pleasurable sex was not once reflected upon in this way. This very much reminds me of MacKinnon's (2016: 450) declaration that: "the sex women want is never described by them as consensual, no one says: 'we had a great hot night, she (or I, or we), consented.'" As Palmer (2016: 6; see also, Chadha, 2020: 620) rightly suggests then, sexual consent will undoubtably be absent from the worst sexual encounters, but it too will be absent in the most positive too. This is because sex, in the positive encounters, is jointly instigated by mutually active partners, partners who will be in a state beyond consent – rather, a state of active involvement as opposed to reaction or submission (Palmer, 2016: 6; Chadha, 2020: 620; see also MacKinnon, 2016: 450). Sexual consent thus does not follow such concrete frameworks, it weaves in and out, and, importantly still, sexual consent does not equate to wantedness or desire (Matthews, 2018).

If our conversations about sex, with and to young people, are to be relevant to them at all, they have to reflect the detailed reality of their lives and all aspects of it (e.g., the ambivalent, the good and bad, and all aspects in between) (Cameron-Lewis and Allen, 2013: 130). An over-reliance on sexual consent as the standard for good, positive sex does not only fail to reflect the reality of how heterosex is experienced for young people, but it too does not allow space for experiences of the tolerated, unwanted but consented to sex to be considered. These are experiences which subsequently fall somewhere outside of the binaries of 'no means no' and 'yes means yes', in the burred in-between. We might then think to move beyond this emphasis

on sexual consent as the benchmark for what constitutes socially acceptable and desirable sex (Matthews, 2018), and instead reframe our conversations and discussions in line with the ethicality of sexual encounters (Carmody, 2005; Cossman, 2018; Allen and Carmody, 2012). The latter idea would potentially encourage discussions amongst young people about some of the topics that the women in this thesis have themselves reflected upon; pain during heterosex for example, the unequal centring of men's pleasure over that of women's and, centrally here, of the difficulties associated with refusing men's sexual advances. In doing so we pay attention to both pleasure and danger, consider the language of respect, responsibility and desires and focus on the possibilities as opposed to the limitations or risks of sex (Carmody, 2005; Cossman, 2018; Allen and Carmody, 2012).

Additionally, looking to the legal aspect of the consented to unwanted sexual scenarios reflected upon in this thesis, one must make the point that the young women involved in this work never viewed their negotiations of consented to unwanted sexual scenarios through the lens of criminality or sexual misconduct – nor did I ask them to. These events were, it seems, normalised and expected, and - as I have described - almost part of a trade-off to preserve their safety. My view here is that it is important we give space to women to retell these inner workings of heterosex and label them as they see fit. We, as researchers, ought not define them under a legal framework just because they may fit a definition of legal harm (Cossman, 2018; Khan, 2016). In fact, my position is that we cannot always look to the law and the criminal justice system to retrospectively recognise, label, and deal with, sexual conduct that might be considered harmful. We might, again, think about sexual ethics here. As Brenda Cossman (2018: 16) notes, the "incommensurability" of two people understanding their sexual encounter might well be a place to begin a conversation about sexuality, rather than recognising the harm caused by sexual misconduct by equating it to legally defined sexual harassment or assault.

8.1.3 Staying with the Present

Conducting focus groups with young women has consequently opened up a space for conversation of the issues that matter to, some, young women. As I have maintained throughout this thesis, it is because of these conversations that I have learned that heterosexuality and women's experiences of it are complex. The women whose stories are reflected upon in this thesis are part of a bigger group of women (e.g., the college aged, heterosexual, predominantly white and middle class). So, at the same time that this thesis addresses them it also addresses a specific demographic of women, as well as women with a particular set of experiences. Their

reflections build up a picture of heterosexuality infused with agency and disempowerment, constraints and concerns. When the young women navigate through heterosexuality, any and all of these things are at play at any given time. So, to portray the women, and the stories that they shared as part of this research, solely as powerless victims existing in a wider system of restrictive heteronormative ideology or as agentic sexual individuals able to *always* carve out a sense of empowerment within their heterosex, would be too dichotomous and ignore the nuances and micro-dynamics of their reflections.

In all of this, what we are holding true is that young women's heterosexual realities are a site of danger and pleasure; that sexual harms, whatever form they take from the legally recognised to the more ambiguous, are pervasive; that pleasure takes many (sometimes incongruous) forms; discourses which dictate a certain way of being heterosexually feminine still have command over women's lives; and despite this, there are moments wherein the young women were able to cause rupture to these oppressive structures. Rather than being emmeshed into arguing whether these breaks to the heterosexual order are valid examples of sexual empowerment, we ought to centre these expressions and build upon them as a starting point for future conversation, and possibly, change. Some established heterosexual constraints of old may well remain, but they can be unsettled with, albeit limited, claims to sexual power and enjoyment. It is thus my fervent hope that this thesis has sufficiently honoured the young women and the stories that they shared. More so than anything, I have endeavoured to reflect the intricacies and sophistications of the women's experiences — experiences like Beth's who disclosed that she had been raped and was going through the Title IX process, which she called the "worst experience of her life". Or the experience of Piper, who shared her story of non-consensual condom removal and grappled with the complexities of this deceptive violation in the process. These are just two of the many stories that remain present for me some 3 years since my first conversations with the young women.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Study Title: How do College Aged Women Make Sense of their Heterosexual Experiences with Young Men?

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Participant Information Sheet for the above study. ☐
2. I have been given the opportunity to consider the information provided, ask questions and have had these questions answered to my satisfaction. ☐
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can ask to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without my medical care or legal rights being affected. ☐
4. I understand that my anonymized data will be stored for a minimum of two years and may be used in future ethically approved research. ☐
5. I agree to take part in this study. ☐

Name of person giving consent	**Date**	**Signature**
_____	_____	_____

Name of person taking consent	**Date**	**Signature**
_____	_____	_____

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT FOCUS GROUP INFORMATION SHEET

You are being invited to take part in research on sorority women's understandings and experiences of sexual consent and relationships as college undergraduates. Chiara Elena Cooper, a second year PhD candidate at the University of Edinburgh, is leading this research. Before you decide to take part, it is important you understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The purpose of the study is to explore college women's understandings of and experiences with the cultures of relationships and sex on campus, paying particular attention to sexual consent and heterosexuality. These understandings and negotiations will be analysed in relation existing research on young women's heterosexual experiences.

WHY HAVE I BEEN INVITED TO TAKE PART?

You are invited to participate in this study because you are a woman student at the University of Texas, Austin

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART?

No – it is entirely up to you. If you do decide to take part, please keep this Information Sheet and complete the Informed Consent Form to show that you understand your rights in relation to the research, and that you are happy to participate. If you do decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Deciding not to take part or withdrawing from the study will not affect your healthcare or employment.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I DECIDE TO TAKE PART?

You will be asked a number of questions regarding consent, sex, relationships, and hooking up at university. The focus group will take place in a safe environment at a time that is convenient to you. Ideally, I would like to audio record your responses (and will require your consent for this), so the location should be in a fairly quiet area. The focus group should take a maximum of one hour to complete. If you decide to take part, it is important to remember and respect the privacy and confidentiality of others in the group, please do not repeat what is discussed and shared outside of the focus group.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?

By sharing your experiences with the researcher (Chiara Elena Cooper) you will be helping her to better understand how a cultural group comprehend and negotiate sex, relationships and consent.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH TAKING PART?

Some topics that will be covered - previous experiences surrounding sex and relationships for example – are sensitive and personal in nature. It is important that you are aware that there is

a possibility that the conversation may induce some distress, this may come about as you may be revisiting events and experiences that have been traumatic. If you feel uncomfortable because of these discussions at any time you do **NOT** have to respond and can leave at any point during the focus group. The researcher will stop the focus group if you feel that the discussion becomes difficult and/or upsetting. As a researcher, I (Chiara Elena Cooper), above all, am concerned that you are happy and comfortable during the focus group. You can also contact the researcher post focus group should you want to discuss anything in more detail or need support. Contact details of organizations on campus who can offer support are listed below.

Title IX Office (titleix@austin.utexas.edu)
512-232-3992

Voices Against Violence *UT Austin Counselling Service*
24-hour Crisis Line: 512-471-CALL
Walk-in service between 8am and 5pm, Monday to Friday: 5th Floor Student Services Building (SSB), 100 W Dean Keeton Street

Behaviour Concerns Advice Line *UT Austin* (https://besafe.utexas.edu/behavior-concerns-advice-line)
Hotline for discussing safety related concerns
24-hour, 7 days a week 512-232-5050

Interpersonal Violence Peer Support (IVPS) *UT Austin*
(http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/advocacysupport.php)
Group of trained undergraduate and graduate students who offer confidential support to students who have experienced or been impacted by interpersonal violence
Monday to Thursday 12pm to 8pm and Friday 12pm to 4pm
512-471-6147
100 W Dean Keeton St, Room G1.408, Austin TX, 78712 (SSB)

Safe Alliance *Local Hotline* (www.safeaustin.org)
512-267-SAFE
Also offer sexual assault advocacy and face-to-face support from a walk-in basis, Monday to Friday 8am to 4pm
1515 Grove Blvd Building A
Austin, TX 78741

loveisrespect 24-hour Hotline (www.loveisrespect.org)
866-331-9474
Text: "lovies" to 22522

RAINN: Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (www.rainn.org)
National Sexual Abuse Hotline: 1-800-656-4673

WHAT IF I WANT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?

Agreeing to participate in this project does not oblige you to remain in the study nor have any further obligation to this study. If, at any stage, you no longer want to be part of the study, please inform the project administrator, Chiara Elena Cooper. You should note that your

data may be used in the production of formal research outputs (e.g. journal articles, conference papers, theses and reports) prior to your withdrawal and so you are advised to contact the research team at the earliest opportunity should you wish to withdraw from the study. On specific request we will destroy all your identifiable answers, but we will need to use the data collected prior to your withdrawal, and to maintain our records of your consenting participation.

DATA PROTECTION AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Your data will be processed in accordance with Data Protection Law. All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. Unless they are anonymized in our records, your data will be referred to by a unique participant number rather than by name. If you consent to being audio recorded, all recordings will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. Your data will only be viewed by the researcher/research team — Professor Sharon Cowan and Dr. Angus Bancroft at the University of Edinburgh. All electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer file and all paper records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Your consent information will be kept separately from your responses in order to minimize risk.

INTERNATIONAL DATA TRANSFERS

Your data will be stored and processed in both Austin, Texas, USA and Edinburgh, United Kingdom.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN WITH THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY?

The results of this study may be summarized in published articles, reports and presentations. Quotes or key findings will always be made anonymous in any formal outputs unless we have your prior and explicit written permission to attribute them to you by name.

WHO CAN I CONTACT?

If you have any further questions about the study, please contact the lead researcher:

Chiara Elena Cooper
202-957-5451
chiara.cooper@ed.ac.uk

If you wish to make a complaint about the study, please contact:

Susan S. Heinzelman (sheinz@austin.utexas.edu)

Sharon Cowan (s.cowan@ed.ac.uk)

In your communication, please provide the study title and detail the nature of your complaint.

APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP QUESTION GUIDE

"Thank you for coming, want this to be an open space to talk without judgement, if anything becomes uncomfortable to talk about don't feel you have to answer."
"Tell me a little bit about yourselves before we start, where did you grow up, what are you studying, are you enjoying college?"

1.0 Probing Questions/Strategies

- "Let's actually talk about that"
- "Imagine you disagreed with that point; how would you go about vocalising that?"
- "In another focus group a student mentioned…"
- "X what do you think?"
- "That's one point of view, let's get another one?"

1.1 General/Scene Setting Questions:

- What are parties like/party culture like on campus?
- Suppose I was at a (fraternity) party on campus, what would I see happening? Take me to that scene, what you'd be doing, what guests would be doing?
- What is it like entering into relationships on campus?
- How would you describe hooking up on campus?

1.2. Open Consent/Heterosexuality Prompts:

- Describe early education about sex and sexuality? Sources of information (school sex education, family, friends, peers, partners, books, magazines, television, movies, pornography).
- How does consent take form during sex (verbal, physical, asked for each act, is it necessary, hooking up)
- Hook ups, are they always pleasurable, are your needs always met/how entitled do you feel to make these needs known?
- Any pressures or expectations on young women today in their relationships or in their intimate interactions with men?
- How empowered do you feel to say no/say what you want during sex?
- Have you ever had a sexual experience that you thought would give you pleasure but didn't? If so, what did you do?
- Throughout my research, men have made reference to this fear they have that after a hook-up, the woman will contact him telling him the encounter was not consensual and/or she didn't enjoy it, what are your thoughts about this?
- I have heard men in my research make reference to a type of sexual double standard (explain this), do you feel this is present on campus? Have you had any experience of this?

1.3 Reflections on the Focus Group Process

- How did you find the interview?
- How are you feeling now?
- Is there anything you would like to clarify or add?
- Give thanks and suggest future discussion

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP MEMBERSHIP DETAILS

FOCUS GROUP 1:

- *Close friends*
- *Members of the same extracurricular group on campus (an a cappella group)*
- *2 hours in duration*

Woman 1 = heterosexual, white, sophomore, in a relationship, part of a spirit group
Woman 2 = heterosexual, Hispanic, junior in a relationship, part of a spirit group
Woman 3 = heterosexual, Hispanic, senior, single, in a sorority
Woman 4 = heterosexual, South Asian, freshman, in a relationship, not in a sorority
Woman 5 = heterosexual, white, freshman, single, not in a sorority
Woman 6 = heterosexual, white, junior, single, in a sorority
Woman 7 = heterosexual, white, sophomore, single, not in a sorority

FOCUS GROUP 2:

- *Close friends*
- *All members of the same sorority*
- *2 hours in duration*

Woman 1 = heterosexual, white, freshman, not in a relationship, in a sorority
Woman 2 = heterosexual, white, freshman, in a relationship, in a sorority
Woman 3 = heterosexual, white, freshman, single, in a sorority
Woman 4 = heterosexual, white, freshman, single, in a sorority
Woman 5 = heterosexual, white, freshman, in a relationship, in a sorority

FOCUS GROUP 3:

- *All members of the same sorority*
- *Only two of the women were close friends, but all were familiar with each other*
- *1 hour 15 minutes in duration*

Woman 1 = heterosexual, Hispanic, senior, single, in a sorority
Woman 2 = heterosexual, white, junior, single, in a sorority
Woman 3 = heterosexual, white, junior, single, in a sorority
Woman 4 = heterosexual, white, junior, in a relationship, in a sorority

FOCUS GROUP 4 (follow up with FG 1):

- *Close friends*
- *Members of the same extra-curricular group on campus (an a cappella group)*
- *Same group of women with the addition of one participant*
    - *This additional participant was a close friend of one member (woman number 3) of the group*
- *2 hours in duration*

Woman 1 = heterosexual, white, sophomore, in a relationship, part of a spirit group
Woman 2 = heterosexual, Hispanic, junior in a relationship, part of an all-female spirit group
Woman 3 = heterosexual, Hispanic, senior, single, in a sorority
Woman 4 = heterosexual, south Asian, freshman, in a relationship, not in a sorority
Woman 5 = heterosexual, white, freshman, single, not in a sorority
Woman 6 = heterosexual, white, junior, single, in a sorority
Woman 7 = heterosexual, white, sophomore, single, not in a sorority
Woman 8 = heterosexual, white, senior, single, not in a sorority

FOCUS GROUP 5 (follow up with FG 2):

- *Close friends*
- *All members of the same sorority*
- *Same group of women, no additional participants*
- *2 hours in duration*

Woman 1 = heterosexual, white, freshman, not in a relationship, in a sorority
Woman 2 = heterosexual, white, freshman, in a relationship, in a sorority
Woman 3 = heterosexual, white, freshman, single, in a sorority
Woman 4 = heterosexual, white, freshman, single, in a sorority
Woman 5 = heterosexual, white, freshman, in a relationship, in a sorority